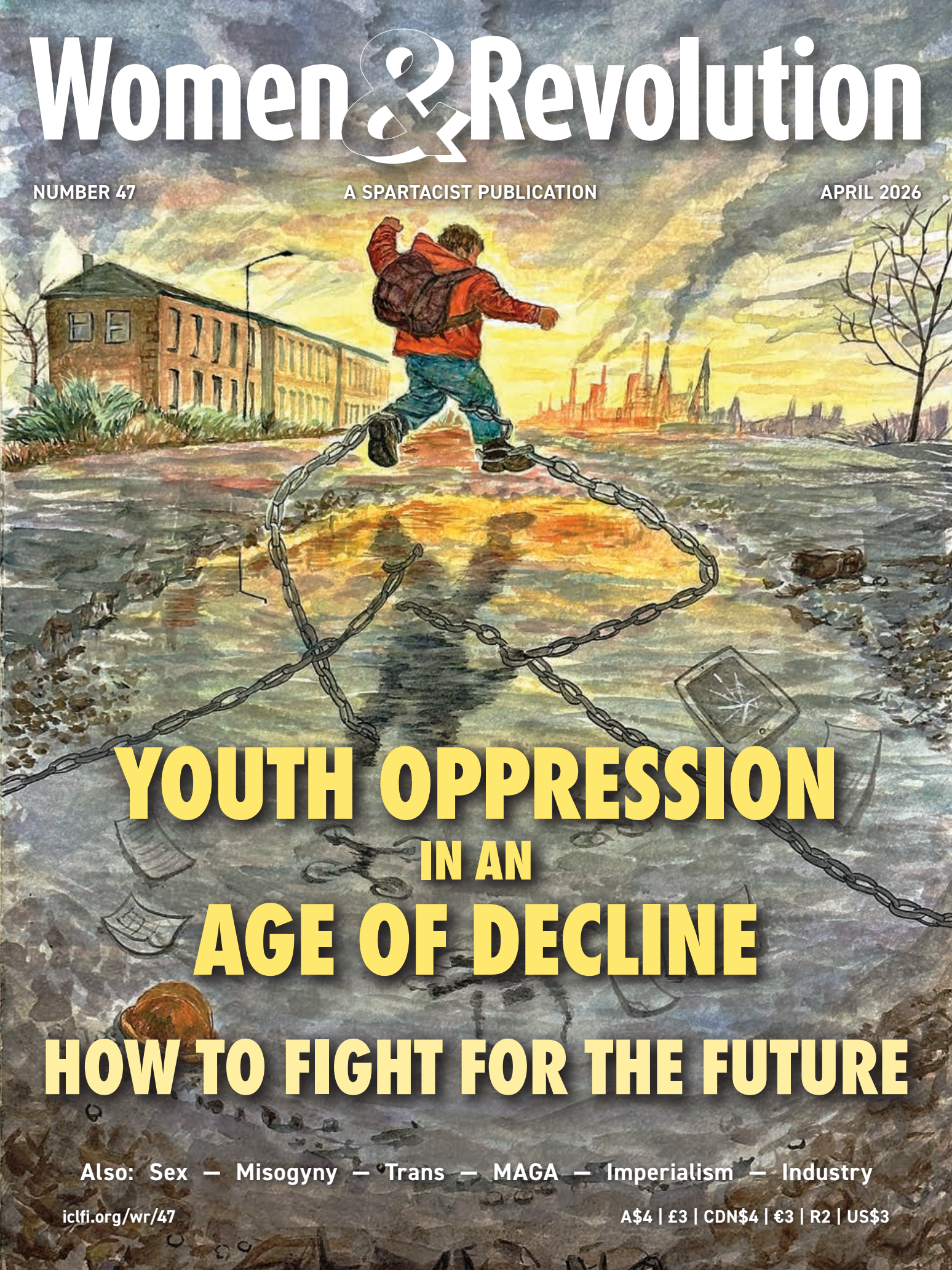
Women & Revolution

NUMBER 47 A SPARTACIST PUBLICATION APRIL 2026



YOUTH OPPRESSION IN AN AGE OF DECLINE

HOW TO FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE

Also: Sex — Misogyny — Trans — MAGA — Imperialism — Industry

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A$4 | £3 | CDN$4 | €3 | R2 | US$3

YOUTH OPPRESSION IN AN AGE OF DECLINE

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Cover art: Lou Xander

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Published by the International Secretariat of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

EDITORIAL BOARD:
Mansa Kaur (editor), Julia Emery (managing editor), Ñico Connelly, Alexandra Dimou, Nadja Dostal, G. Perrault, Olive Shewell
PRODUCTION MANAGER: François Donau
CIRCULATION MANAGER: Miguel Acevedo

SPARTACIST PUBLISHING COMPANY
Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116, USA
spartacist@spartacist.org
The closing date for this issue is April 13.

Number 47 — April 2026

HOW TO FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE

BY MANSA KAUR

***Christmas* by Dmitry Stakhievich Moor, 1921: Clergy, capitalists and kings follow Star of Bethlehem; workers and Red Army soldiers follow the red star of revolution. Banners read: "Long Live the World Army of Labor!" and "Workers of All Countries, Unite!"**

Big events are shaking the world. Every day we wake up to new chaos sown by U.S. imperialism as it strives to defend Pax Americana. Amidst the endless analysis of world events, what gets overlooked is how these dynamics are remolding the social fabric of entire societies. But one doesn't have to look hard or think long to notice that the sense of certainty and normalcy characteristic of the last decades is rapidly dissolving into deep anxiety about the future. This is especially true for young people.

As anxiety permeates social life, we are witnessing growing divisions across the board: native-born vs. immigrant, feminists vs. the manosphere, women's rights vs. trans rights, "woke" liberals vs. MAGA—the list goes on. What's clear is that minorities are under the gun everywhere. These polarizations pit the oppressed against one another and hamper the struggle against U.S. imperialism and the chaos it is sowing.

Marxists must build this struggle. The question is ***how***. Merely preaching unity in the face of deep divisions won't work, nor will limiting oneself to proclaiming the need for socialism and revolution for the future. This is not Marxism, but tomfoolery. We must provide answers stemming from the ***common class interests*** of all the oppressed, fighting to bring these to the fore, all the while combating bigotry by showing how the divisions it breeds only serve to advance the interests of the ruling classes. This issue of *Women & Revolution* seeks to do precisely this, with a particular focus on the question of youth. Only by preparing youth for the coming storms can the Marxist movement revitalize itself and emerge as a real factor capable of fighting for our future.

Imperialist Decline, Rising Reaction

In fighting its decline, U.S. imperialism is smashing everything that stands in its way. This explains why it is breaking up the liberal world order which it built on the ashes of the Soviet Union. Under this old order, it proclaimed democracy, freedom, multiculturalism, human rights, open borders, etc., as universal values. Together, these were the pillars of liberalism, the dominant ideology used by U.S. imperialism to mask its plunder of the world and uphold its hegemony over it. As Trotsky explains, "The appeal to abstract norms is not a disinterested philosophical mistake but a necessary element in the mechanics of class deception" (*Their Morals and Ours*, 1938).

These values are no longer an option. The belligerence necessary for the U.S. to regain its hegemony cannot be executed while touting liberal ideology. And both wings of the U.S. ruling class—Democrats and Republicans—know this. They differ only about how this break from liberalism should be carried out. This explains why the U.S. is tearing up liberalism, seeking to replace it with an ideological superstructure which can rally support behind the naked aggression at

Rising reaction from Japan (Takaichi Sanae with Trump), France (Marine Le Pen with youth), Britain (Nigel Farage) to Germany. AfD poster says: "It's time to make policies that benefit young people."

home and abroad. From open season on immigrants, nativism and anti-trans hysteria to genocide, war and pursuing diplomacy under the barrel of a gun—all of these are justified in the name of "Make America Great Again." The rise of right-wing reaction is thus the ideological expression of U.S. imperialism fighting to stay on top.

This in and of itself does not explain why the right—especially the populists and far right—is able to appeal to large layers of the working classes throughout the West. For liberals, the answer is that they are simply backward—too uneducated to be able to cut through the gutter press and everything else the algorithm throws at them. But it is liberalism itself and the methods of the liberals which drove workers to the right. Let us illustrate.

The period of globalization resulted in material changes in the social fabric of the West. Immigration increased, LGBTQ+ discourse became mainstream, affirmative action put a handful of minorities in charge on the job. But alongside social liberalization, the fortunes of the working class as a whole plummeted. From offshoring and outsourcing to the 2008 financial crisis and then the pandemic, the working people were battered to no end.

But each time a new series of attacks was unleashed, the liberals used identity politics and professed concern for minorities as a means of discrediting and silencing dissent. The working people were told to swallow attacks in the name of anti-racism, diversity, women's rights, environmentalism and the like. Such enlightened scorn made huge swaths of the working class sick to death of the liberals, resentful of minorities, and looking for ways to stick it to the status quo.

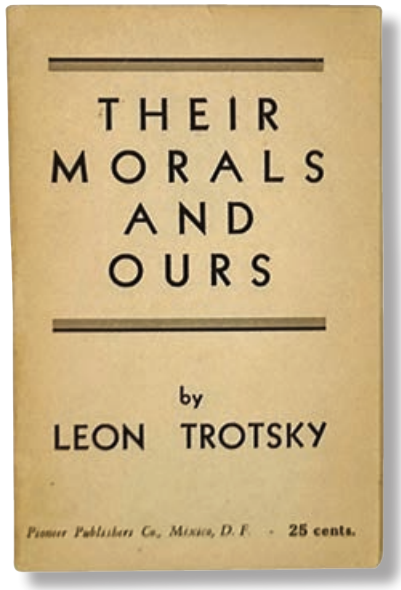
In this current conjuncture defined by the breakdown of U.S. hegemony, there is a convergence between the interests of the U.S. imperialist ruling class and the deep anger, resentment and insecurity felt by large segments of entire populations: both are looking to break with the status quo. This creates a fertile ground for right-wing and reactionary forces to seize on the anxieties among the population and use them to inflame and exacerbate existing prejudices. This deepens social polarizations along the lines of values and morals. These are indispensable tools with which the insurgent right batters down liberalism and the liberals. In this way, these polarizations act as the midwife of the reactionary realignment emerging from a dying liberal order.

This is an international phenomenon which is reflected and refracted internally to varying degrees in the West. Where Trump has MAGA, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) raises the slogan "Germany. But normal" through remigration, the mass expulsion of entire immigrant-derived populations; Marine Le Pen in France promises to speak "*au nom du peuple*" (in the name of the people) through her party's policy of "*préférence nationale*"; Nigel Farage wants to Reform Broken Britain by upholding Judeo-Christian values and making sure children learn about Britain's "great and proud history"; and Japan's first woman prime minister, Takaichi Sanae, is repopularizing the slogan "*futsu no kuni*" ("normal country") to break the population from Japan's post-WWII pacifism and march on the road to rearmament.

As the U.S. spreads misery, those who will bear the brunt in the most brutal way will be those at the bottom of the international chain: countries under the boot of imperialism. In these societies, the already murderous divisions will be redoubled, leading to an increase in violence against minorities, the rise of right-wing nationalism and religious fundamentalism. Consider the rise in anti-Muslim violence under Modi, Trump's "very good friend"; or José Antonio Kast, the new president of Chile and a fan of Pinochet, who ran on the slogan "*Hacer grande a Chile otra vez*" (Make Chile Great Again); or the fate of the poorest in multiple countries where the U.S./Israeli war against Iran has left them without fuel even to cook with.

How to Combat Reaction

Imperialist decline and the social decay it generates is the material basis upon which right-wing reaction is growing. The fight against right-wing reaction is therefore inseparable



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Left: Right-wing "Unite the Kingdom" demonstration, London, September 2025. Right: Jeremy Corbyn, Green Party leader Zack Polanski and Zarah Sultana lead Together Alliance march, London, March 28.

from fighting U.S. imperialism, the force dragging the whole social fabric of the world in a spiral toward barbarism. But this fight can only advance if it is based on complete independence from the ideological and moral influence of the very force responsible for the chaos surrounding us.

To understand what this means, it is important to return to the basic Marxist approach to the realm of ideology and morality. Marxism takes as its starting point that there is no such thing as "universal morality." That is, there are no eternal truths and values floating above the heads of people, divorced from the social conditions and class relations prevailing at a given time and place. Trotsky's *Their Morals and Ours* is indispensable here. He writes:

> "Whoever does not care to return to Moses, Christ, or Mohammed; whoever is not satisfied with eclectic ***hodge-podges*** must acknowledge that morality is a product of social development; that there is nothing immutable about it; that it serves social interests; that these interests are contradictory; that morality more than any other form of ideology has a class character."

If we understand that liberalism, as the moral philosophy of U.S. imperialism at a particular historical juncture, is what paved the way for the right-wing backlash against it, then it follows that revolutionaries must clearly distinguish themselves from liberals and make a political break from liberalism. Associating ourselves with liberal influences can only strengthen the right.

At the same time, we must combat the growing conservative social attitudes, religiosity and traditional values in the working class and among young people. To do both is akin to balancing on a political tightrope, especially in the current polarized social climate. There are and will be pressures in both directions, but the way not to succumb to either side is to base oneself on the historic interests of the working class. This is less complicated than it sounds: just as you cannot win a strike in cahoots with the boss, you cannot fight imperialist reaction with liberalism. To return to Trotsky: "A revolutionary Marxist cannot begin to approach his historical mission without having broken morally from bourgeois public opinion and its agencies in the proletariat."

But from this does it follow that wherever we go, we must raise slogans declaring our moral independence from the bourgeoisie on all fronts? Should we go to a picket line and insist that for it to be successful, the strikers must also break from religion and proclaim atheism, or reject patriarchy, since both are also instruments of the ruling class? Of course not.

While this sounds ridiculous when presented this way, it raises important questions for ***how*** Marxists should combat the influence of bourgeois ideology among the masses. Revolutionaries must fight for working-class independence, but they must do so in a way that does not ***inflame*** existing prejudices, but brings shared class interests to the fore, in opposition to both the liberal and the right wings of the ruling class as a whole. The way to do this is to not make the realm of ideas the primary terrain of political struggle.

The Marxist approach to religion provides the necessary framework. Marxism holds that religion serves to mask class exploitation and "befuddle the working class." In this sense, liberalism or MAGA or any other ideology of the ruling class is like religion. All such ideologies must be combated; we must expose their true function in the eyes of the masses. But they must be combated in a ***materialist way***: the struggle against them must be subordinated to the struggle for socialism. Lenin, in "The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion" (1909) explains this succinctly:

> "A Marxist must be a materialist, i.e., an enemy of religion, but a dialectical materialist, i.e., one who treats the struggle against religion not in an abstract way, not on the basis of remote, purely theoretical, never varying preaching, but in a concrete way, on the basis of the class struggle which is going on ***in practice*** and is educating the masses more and better than anything else could."

If we consider the huge segments of the working class that have right-wing, nativist, anti-immigrant as well as religious ideas, every single word of Lenin reads like a guide for what

to do today. We will not win such workers away from these influences if we preach abstractly about the virtues of open borders or some other enlightened idea, hoping that with enough explanation, they will finally get the point. Sermonizing good values ***abstracted*** from the social conditions that prevent their realization can only push such workers further away.

Let us be concrete. A common trend in many Western countries is governments dumping refugees in cities/towns which are run-down, decrepit, and starved by years of austerity ***without*** providing enough additional resources. This is a recipe for breeding resentment and hatred for refugees among the local population—which incidentally is precisely what these governments want. The way to combat this state of affairs would be to motivate that both the local workers ***and*** refugees wage a united struggle against the government to improve conditions, since this is in the interest of both.

This won't happen magically, and it definitely won't happen if we begin to just denounce the locals for their reactions. The latter will push the locals away and further isolate the refugees. The only way to avoid the pitfalls which inflame divisions would be to take a clear stand in defense of the refugees, while at the same time providing a concrete way to draw in the widest layers in practical struggle based on their ***shared material interest***. This would demonstrate concretely to the "backward" workers that it is not the refugees but the powers that be who are responsible for their conditions.

Now step back. This ***same*** dynamic is present throughout the Global South: Afghan refugees in Pakistan, or Syrians in Türkiye, or Sudanese in Egypt. The list goes on. The same method of combating divisions applies to these situations as much as it does to a decrepit city in Germany or France.

However, this is not the approach that is generally deployed by the left. There are two wrong answers when it comes to dealing with social polarizations: one is ultraleftism, the other is economism. The former shuns all backwardness, shouting "fascist!" at any supporter of Reform UK or Trump, or for that matter, Modi or Milei. Their answer is to proclaim socialism and revolution without providing any answers which can ***undercut*** the growth of the right and combat divisions in the here and now. This approach can only fuel the backlash.

In contrast, economism tries to address today's struggles, but does so by ignoring, minimizing or conciliating backwardness in favor of bread-and-butter issues, preaching socialism for the future. Its logic is to build unity on the lowest common denominator, such as wages. But in reality, this approach amounts to ditching the particular concerns of oppressed groups—whether that's women, trans people, immigrants or religious minorities—because these would "alienate" others. Thus, it ends up conciliating existing prejudices and thereby perpetuating the divisions among the working class, ultimately undermining both the struggle for today ***and*** for socialism.

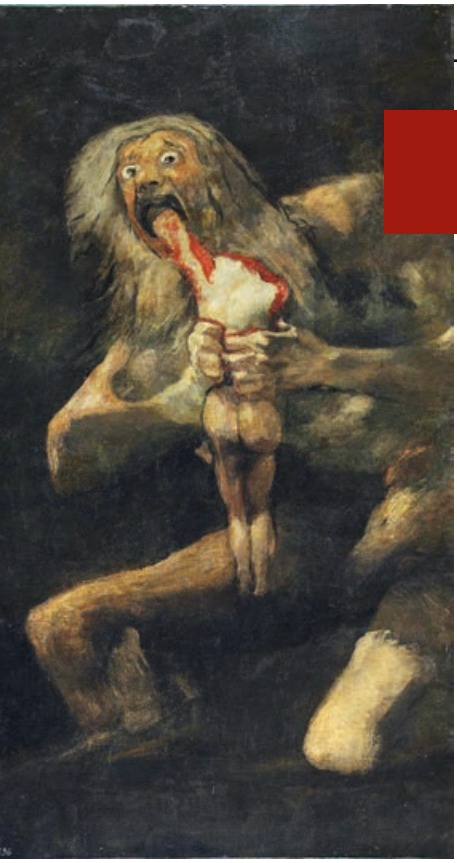
To both of these false answers, Lenin responded in the above cited article:

> "A Marxist must be able to view the concrete situation as a whole, he must always be able to find the boundary between anarchism [or ultraleftism] and opportunism (this boundary is relative, shifting and changeable, but it exists). And he must not succumb either to the abstract, verbal, but in reality empty 'revolutionism' of the anarchist, or to the philistinism and opportunism of the petty bourgeois or liberal intellectual, who boggles at the struggle against religion, forgets that this is his duty, reconciles himself to belief in God, and is guided not by the interests of the class struggle but by the petty and mean consideration of offending nobody, repelling nobody and scaring nobody—by the sage rule: 'live and let live,' etc., etc."

In this age of imperialist decline, revolutionaries must navigate a political climate littered with socially charged dynamite which threatens to explode at the slightest misstep. We must traverse this landscape carefully; we have sought to return to the ABC of Marxism to provide a guide for what to do and what not to do.

* * *

In this issue, we use this method of analysis and intervention across multiple themes which illustrate the concrete dynamics of division and the means of combating it in a Marxist way. The bulk of the articles deal with youth, who are being used as a key wedge with which the right pushes its moral crusade of traditional family values, and who are rapidly facing a worsening future. Alongside youth, we also present key articles on sex, gender, violence against women and misogyny, right-wing workers and women in the working class. We hope these will engage and inspire our readers. As always, in the spirit of political clarity, we welcome discussion, debate and correspondence. ■



Saturn Devouring His Son
by Francisco Goya, 1820-23

Capitalism Eats Its Young

What Is Children's and Youth Oppression?

BY NATALIE ROSENBERG

It is no surprise that children and youth make up one of the most vulnerable groups of people on earth. They have genuine biological disadvantages that are transformed into near-total social disadvantages and are brutally oppressed under capitalism. This is all so obvious that we rarely stop to think about it. Yet it sets up some questions at the heart of the matter that often go unasked: what are childhood and youth exactly, and what is the nature of their oppression? Up until now, Marxism has produced very little theory or analysis of these questions. This article aims to begin to provide some answers to both of them using the Marxist method. It is imperative that we fight this oppression because children and youth are vital to our collective future as the working class, and as a Marxist movement. Our class, as part of taking control over all of society, must in particular take control over the social process by which children grow up.

What Is Childhood and What Is Youth?

Let us begin at the beginning. Childhood begins with infancy, a stage of life that is somewhat unique to mammals. Like other mammals, human infants require the care of primary adult figures, to whom they are emotionally attached, for both their biological and social development. What is virtually unique to human infancy and childhood is just how long it takes. This is because of the size and complexity of the human brain, which continues to develop for all of childhood, and indeed across the entire lifespan.

Along with our large brains, humans also require a lot of time to learn the highly complex norms of our societies. These norms have hugely varied throughout history and around the world and influence how long it takes for a child to be considered a full adult in their community. For example, it takes much longer for a child to learn how to be a functioning adult in capitalist industrial societies today as opposed to, say, a small hunter-gatherer tribe over 10,000 years ago.

Youth is the period, varying by society, that begins toward the end of childhood and extends somewhat into early adulthood. This is when young people are becoming increasingly independent, taking on more and more adult responsibilities and becoming more integrated into adult social life. This period of life is distinct in that physical development is nearly or almost complete but social development continues.

Both childhood and youth are periods of transition to becoming a fully mature member of society. While youth does come with gradually increasing independence, there is no strict division between childhood and youth. It is more of a long, continuous curve than separate stages.

What Is Children's and Youth Oppression?

None of the above is especially oppressive in and of itself. Rather, it is natural to human biology and essential to culture and civilization. This is shown by the fact that every form of human society, both pre-class and class societies, has recognized some form of childhood and period of youth, often marked by rituals and obligations (e.g., the classic "rites of passage" described in anthropology and popular culture). So where, then, does the oppression come into things?

Due to the fact that child-rearing is largely treated as a private family function in modern capitalist societies, the kind of childhood most children have is entirely random and based on what social class, race, etc., one's parents happen to belong to. This is the central injustice of childhood under capitalism: you don't get to choose your family or the social

Erbay/Shutterstock; Shutterstock; Dodge/Getty

One's childhood is conditioned by the class, race, country, etc. one's parents happen to belong to.

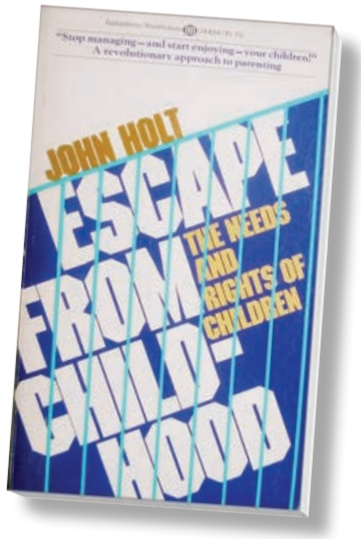
station you start out life with, and the discipline you face is meant to force you into joining that class as you reach adulthood.

The vulnerability of children and youth is exacerbated by oppressive conditions under capitalism. In addition to the oppression that workers, women, black people and other minorities face, which affects children and youth as well, they are burdened with capitalist indoctrination during their education (itself regimented and even militaristic at times). Some children and youth also suffer physical, mental and sexual abuse both at home and in institutions. Many also feel a profound helplessness and dependence in the face of poverty, war and other hardships.

Capitalism has two tendencies when it comes to children and youth: to artificially strengthen and prolong dependence and to dump adult responsibilities onto children without providing adult privileges. The first tendency disciplines children and youth into the values and social expectations of capitalist society. In the United States, this often means a fierce religiosity as well as obedience to authority. For working-class children, the message is to accept the crumbs one is given and to always work harder to achieve the American Dream.

The tendency to place adult responsibilities onto children without any of the privileges usually affects older children in families of poorer immigrants, workers and the unemployed. This could mean helping with a family business, getting an outside job and/or taking care of younger siblings. Such work is often unpaid or very poorly paid, interferes with school and leisure and does precious little to prepare youth for decent work by adulthood. In today's gig economy world, when parents need to take on multiple jobs and incomes to get by, it is even more expected that working-class children do these things without much benefit to themselves. This is all on top of the regular discipline children face.

The requirement that adults socialize children and youth under the oppressive conditions of capitalist society is the basis for divisions within the family. Today's worsening conditions exacerbate these tensions, as the pressures to ensure children's safety and survival often run up against their desire for more independence.



Holt advocates for children to have all adult rights and responsibilities.

Against Libertarian and Liberal Conceptions of Childhood

Now let's talk about what isn't the origin of children's and youth oppression: childhood itself, or some "institution of childhood." There are two groups of people we will address. One are the libertarians who want to abolish childhood as inherently oppressive. The other are radical liberal human rights activists who want to reform the institutions they hold responsible for the oppressive aspects of childhood.

The libertarian answer in particular comes from a specific moment in history. In response to the liberal civil rights and mainstream women's movements of the 1960s, a brief movement for child and youth liberation was born in the United States. This began in the 1970s with small groups at high schools founding groups for youth liberation. They were later joined by liberal activists concerned that children and young people seemed to be making hardly any social or cultural progress compared to other oppressed groups at the time. Former schoolteacher John Holt was a prominent early figure in this movement. He defined his concept of an "institution of childhood" in this way:

> "In short, by the institution of childhood I mean all those attitudes and feelings, and also customs and laws, that put a great gulf or barrier between the young and their elders, and the world of their elders; that make it difficult or impossible for young people to make contact with the larger society around them and, even more, to play any kind of active, responsible, useful part in it; that lock the young into eighteen years or more of subservience and dependency and make of them, as I said before, a mixture of expensive nuisance, fragile treasure, slave and super-pet."
>
> —*Escape from Childhood* (E. P. Dutton, 1974)

Holt concluded that changing those aspects of culture and practice would liberate children. He argued that children should have all the same rights as adults and that the distinction between childhood and adulthood is socially arbitrary.

Germany

To Fight Conscription, Fight Against NATO!

BY NADJA DOSTAL

Around 50,000 students went on strike for one day each in December 2025 and March 2026 in over 100 German cities to protest plans to reintroduce conscription. Another school strike has been announced for May 8. Under pressure from U.S. imperialism, the Bundeswehr is being significantly rearmed with the aim of making it the strongest conventional army in Europe. The majority of young people oppose conscription. At the March 5 demonstration in Berlin, 6,000 participants chanted slogans including "Friedrich Merz to the front" and shouted: "Never again conscription" and "The rich want war, the youth want a future." The federal government decided in December to take the first steps toward reintroducing military service: questionnaires for all youth about their health and interest in serving in the army (mandatory for men) followed by compulsory physical examinations for men. If not enough volunteers sign up for the army as a result, compulsory service will be implemented.

Seeking to maintain its dwindling global dominance through military force, the U.S. is forcing its allies within the NATO alliance to spend more on their own militaries. As a junior partner, Germany more or less grudgingly capitulates to every demand from Trump. This is because German capitalists profit enormously from the partnership with the U.S. and are dependent on it. To make progress in the fight against the reintroduction of conscription, the student movement must tackle the root of the problem, oppose Germany's alliance with the U.S. and ***reject NATO***.

Many students look to the Left Party, as it is the only force in parliament that fundamentally opposes conscription and welcomed the student strikes. Left Party leader Jan Van Aken solidarized with the protests in December, asking: "Why should I defend a country that doesn't give a damn about my future? Why is there suddenly money for tanks, but never for good education?" (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, 4 December 2025). A completely legitimate question. Yet the Left Party leadership does not act on it. Contrary to formal party resolutions opposing NATO, the Bremen Left Party voted in the Bundesrat (Federal Council) to abolish the *Schuldenbremse* (fiscal rule limiting the amount of debt the governments can take on), thus allowing the Merz government to arm itself without limit. The party leadership then defended them. Despite occasional anti-NATO rhetoric, the Left Party leadership ***always*** sides with NATO and supports the sanctions against Russia and Iran. In so doing, it contributes in practice to military buildup and the destruction of the future.

Ying Tang/NurPhoto

Cologne, 5 December 2025: Hundreds of students joined nationwide strike against conscription. Their banner says "The Rich Want War, the Youth Want a Future."

Socialist youth groups represented in the organization of the student strikes must now fight to orient the student movement ***against NATO*** in order to stop conscription. This struggle is linked to the fight for an anti-imperialist, revolutionary leadership of the Left Party that clearly opposes NATO, arms to Ukraine and Israel and the sanctions.

He argued this even though he recognized that there is some natural biological difference. He imagined that a sweeping, libertarian solution of blowing up all social structures that distinguish adults from children would serve all children. For example, he advocated for getting rid of laws (e.g., voting age), customs and institutions like schools. What Holt failed to recognize is that children's dependence and the often oppressive institutions that service them are products of material conditions and social organization (e.g., the family), not laws or personal relationships.

Furthermore, Holt portrayed all adults and children as enemies of each other, since children are "a mixture of expensive nuisance, fragile treasure, slave and super-pet." There do, of course, exist antagonisms between children and adults in capitalist society. But the fundamental objective interests of adults and children in the working class are not opposed to each other. In fact, older children and youth can join together with working-class adults to fight in the class struggle against the capitalist class, which upholds the social systems that really make childhood and youth oppressive.

The youth liberation movement of the 1970s is pretty much dead today, with only tiny remnants left. What we have instead are liberal NGOs and other charitable organizations advocating for children's and youth rights. Decades of such activism followed the 1989 United Nations Convention on the

continued on page 36

Australia Down With the Youth Social Media Ban!

BY OSKAR DZIGA

Last December, the Australian government introduced a ban on youth under 16 holding social media accounts across all major online platforms. Millions of accounts have been banned since the minimum age came into effect and the government continues to promote its policy as a test run to be emulated internationally. Now, countries from the UK to Spain, Greece and France are considering similar age restrictions. In the U.S., both Trump and Democrats like Gavin Newsom are eyeing them.

These laws are totally reactionary. They will do nothing to protect kids from the deep social pressures bearing down on them. What they will do is further restrict open space for young people's autonomy and self-expression, bolster the state's social regimentation of youth and deepen resentment.

It goes without saying that social media platforms, interested only in extracting data and profit from their users, are no friends of young people. The fact that harm does take place through and on them, as well as their deliberately addictive nature, is exactly why age restriction is such a popular policy among parents. Politicians say they want to get kids back into the "real world." But for so many youth, the real world ahead of them seems like a futureless horror show of war, devastation and personal social instability.

Young people need space to live and make mistakes, economic stability and real community (both offline and online) to develop into adults with a healthy social existence. The current social order cannot provide this.

Schools across Australia are falling apart. Kids are treated like prisoners. The cost-of-living and housing crises, and generalised social decay, hit kids hard, particularly those in immigrant working-class communities. Suicide is the major cause of death for youth between 15 and 24 years old and unemployment for that cohort is almost double-digit.

The response of state governments from Victoria to the Northern Territory has been to launch an anti-crime frenzy, particularly centered on youth. "Adult time for violent crime" legislation now allows courts to impose penalties previously reserved for adults on children as young as ten. A 14-year-old in Victoria can legally be sent to prison for life…but of course can't have an Instagram account.

Restricting social media is a cynical and futile political tool for governments unable to address the actual crises facing young people, or to improve conditions for anyone for that matter. These measures cynically appeal to parents by falsely blaming apps and algorithms for the problems of youth. For the Labor government, the ban means it can present itself as doing something to maintain "social cohesion" and "save" youth by bolstering the family. Spokespeople promote age restrictions explicitly as a "weapon in the arsenal" of parental authority, a way to "protect" kids from the unknown. For those family-first right-wingers who back them, this also fits in with culture-war grievances over supposedly eroding parental authority.

The drive to keep youth away from corrupting influences online continues to deepen, with the government in recent weeks introducing mandatory age verification for porn, R-rated video games and AI chatbots. The ban on social media thus ***complements*** the framework of repression. Such laws serve, at least in part, to further the regimentation of the young generation as the capitalist rulers prepare to crack down on social unrest and ultimately line up the population for war.

For teenagers, the relative autonomy afforded by social media fills the gaps in a restricted social existence. For better and (often) for worse, it is the primary space for communication, for finding a modicum of community, for coming into political awareness and for exploring sexuality. The latter is especially true for LGBTQ+ youth, who are even more likely to be isolated by restrictions on social media.

Young people who want to use social media will work around whatever system is implemented, and so they should. But it is crucial that there be a fightback against the whole ideological basis for these restrictions. Marxists must take a firm political stand: ***Down with the youth social media bans!*** ■

Britain

Youth Need a Future, Not a Social Media Ban

BY TOM G.

The following article first appeared in Workers Hammer *No. 257 (Spring 2026).*

Since banning porn for youth with the Online Safety Act (see page 31), the liberals have now turned their attention to social media. Although the initial plan introduced by the "Lords" to implement an Australia-style total ban on social media for under 16s has been blocked for now, a swarm of Tory, Liberal Democrat and Labour MPs, as well as trade union leaders and washed-up celebs, are still pushing for it. The Labour government itself has not ruled it out completely, instead stalling for a "consultation period". Finished with fleecing the disabled, the now Science Secretary (whatever that is) Liz Kendall has been given powers to "restrict or ban children of certain ages from accessing social media services and chat bots". This is a heated topic for parents and to chart a way forward for youth, the question must be put on the right terrain.

We should start by being frank: social media can be harmful. Kids glued to their phones, "doom scrolling" instead of being interactive and present in the real world, is not progressive. Boys only having to be on social media for 30 minutes before Andrew Tate pops up is not a good thing. And the obsession over how many "likes" and "comments" for meaningless posts and cringe selfies is further degrading the mental health of "Generations suicide watch", AKA Gens Z and Alpha.

Never mind the pro-genocide and anti-worker parliamentarians for a moment; the many parents who support this ban do it out of the sincere love and fierce protection they have for their kids. Most parents want their young to have a life that is as carefree as possible so that they can focus on the things that matter at that age, ie, making friends, learning new things, etc, to lay the groundwork for a stable and happy adult life. But here lies the first problem. This is, unfortunately, an impossible illusion in today's Broken Britain.

Schools are a crumbling and cramped mess: underfunded, overfilled, understaffed, with teachers past the point of burnout. But economic constraints are only half the problem. Every turbulent social issue in society is brought to school, with the school boards only having liberal nonsense as a response, leaving teachers defenceless against the brewing storm of reaction (see page 20). As for students, just making it through the day is getting more impossible in this environment, not even speaking of the huge pressure they face to get decent grades.

Look beyond the awful walls of school and what is there for youth? Well, not much. Future good job prospects are non-existent, wars are breaking out around the globe and social relations between people are just as broken as the country itself. It is a sad state of affairs; kids can't just put that to the side and delude themselves with a comfortable world that doesn't exist. Social media is the "natural" place to turn for an escape, a distraction, whatever you want to call it, in this terrible, rotting society. An effective ban on social media will only make youth turn to darker corners of the web to get their fix.

Here is the second problem: whilst social media offers an escape, it is still a reflection of society. If kids want to drown in an online world, it is because they are desperately trying to hide from a real world that sucks. If boys cannot go 30 minutes without seeing Andrew Tate, it is because he resonates with the anger felt in their lives. If insecurity over "likes" and "comments" dominates the priorities of a young person, it is because their real life is so void of genuine meaning. Tackling the very real addiction, harmful content and draining of mental health that social media creates requires a fight against the society we live in. Anything else not only stops short but undermines that struggle.

Why is this? Young people are curious, confused and vulnerable beings. They have not been socialised properly yet, they are interpreting and learning to understand the world in a way that is aspirational but also primitive and dependent on adults. More precisely, they are developing their independence whilst materially still being dependent on their parents, stuck in the dreadful crisis society is in. This is the contradiction with youth and social media. On the one hand, social media offers an idealistic aspiration of independence; a world without your parents and adult expectations. You can be a freer expression of yourself and explore interests not accessible elsewhere. On the other hand, everything created in this world still flows from the real world and intensifies all its ills—isolation, hopelessness and depravity.

This is necessary to understand. Society today works as an obstacle to youth freedom, and no one has any real answers. Obviously, youth will cling to any kind of shortcut that gives them a space where they can feel like they are achieving their aims to some degree, even if it is a fantasy. To push youth forward, we must win them to fight for a society that is better. Blocking them from social media is only cutting them off from a tiny window into their aspirations.

Now, back to those genocide-loving and working-class-hating parliamentarians. Here lies problem three: all they have ever done and continue to do is wreck this country even more. The social media ban is an attempt to plaster over a gaping wound. We need to rebuild industry, build homes, strip bare the City of London and empower the working class to create the conditions where youth can prosper. This is everything they are opposed to and ultimately why life is so dire for young people. Independence from these swine means everything in the fight for youth. ■

Youth See No Future

BY FELIX SOKOLOV

One of the most obvious defining features of youth consciousness today is deep anxiety about the future. Middle-class youth—long insulated from insecurity, used to living a relatively comfortable life and promised the world through a clearly laid-out series of steps—are now confronting this reality. The world that promised gradual improvement, stability, education and upward mobility is changing. The ruling class is tightening the screws on young people, workers and the oppressed and its rotting economy can no longer afford niceties such as higher education and a degree of social mobility for broad layers of the population.

These youth have little confidence in the future, but they remain stuck on the path that has been imposed on them: study hard, get good grades, go to university, get a degree, find a good, comfortable job, have 2.5 children, buy a house, get a dog, and live happily ever after. They do this not out of conviction but out of ***inertia***. Although no decisive shock has yet forced a break, that shock will come. Many go to university only to come out debt-ridden and with no job in sight. Meanwhile, industrial jobs have largely disappeared, as most economies in the Western world have been hollowed out.

Working-class and ghetto youth, by contrast, have long experienced exclusion and degradation in the education system. This is especially true of young boys and even more so for black, Latino and Muslim kids, who are often seen and treated by teachers as nothing more than loud, annoying and unintelligent troublemakers. What is new for this layer is that they are being absorbed into a society that is literally rotting from the inside out. They have to make their way in an economy dominated by low-wage, unstable jobs with long hours and grueling conditions. Unlike their forebears, they cannot rely on industrial jobs to compensate for educational marginalization. And for many who lack the means to leave their parents' home, it's like being told, just as you're about to be free, that your prison sentence has been extended indefinitely.

It is important to understand that we are living in a period of ***transition***, halfway between an old order that is dying and a more reactionary one that is emerging. Expectations formed in one historical epoch continue to largely influence behavior, but they are colliding with the material reality of a new, harsher one. It is this conflict that generates anxiety and uncertainty.

Realignments Among Youth

How young people react to these changes reflects the different positions they occupy in society and the specific pressures they're under. But some overall trends are clear.

Military recruitment is on the rise across the West, driven by youth unemployment, economic hardship and the ideological backlash against liberal values. These factors have essentially turned young men into cannon fodder for reactionary forces. Many are naturally drawn toward the military, whose appeal lies primarily in the fact that, in exchange for one's body, one receives food and shelter, an education, a community, a sense of belonging and masculinity (which has been stigmatized for many young men).

Relatedly, religion is experiencing a resurgence. It is not uncommon that young people become more religious than their parents. Religion is, above all, an outlet for fear and despair. It is interesting (and unsurprising) to note that religions which adapted least to the hegemonic liberal values of the previous era are now benefiting from this trend: Islam and Catholicism in many parts of Europe and Canada; or Protestant evangelicalism in the U.S. and Latin America.

Today's young people are overwhelmed by a sense of impending doom and powerlessness in the face of invisible forces changing the world. Those who sense the rightward trajectory of society and fear the growth of reaction cannot explain it and see no force capable of resisting it. The result

is that despair dominates, especially in a period when workers and the oppressed are on the back foot and the initiative is firmly in the hands of the imperialists, who seem to be on the offensive everywhere, acting with the strength of 12 titans. "Doomerism," withdrawal into private life and various forms of escapism—from music to social media to AI girlfriends—are very common. Many try to avoid politics, seeing it as stress-inducing rather than empowering, and others try to avoid the news entirely. While this is an understandable impulse, in today's world it necessarily means disarming oneself at a time when one is in most need of being well-armed.

Reversal of the Roles of Left and Right

Everyone is talking about the shifts and realignments occurring among youth, especially regarding the manosphere and the rise of the right. But why is it that while previous generations of youth wanting to fight the status quo turned to the left, today they tend to look to the right?

Many do continue to adhere to the traditional view of the right as the force that represents the status quo, defends traditional values and opposes change. In simple terms, right = status quo, left = change. ***But this trend has been fundamentally reversed.*** Liberal ideology is so deeply entrenched in many institutions, in the very fabric of capitalist society, that many young people who are hungry for change (and men in particular) are turning to the right out of sheer revulsion for the parties and ideology responsible for their immiseration.

Being conservative is now a countercultural and rebellious movement, and there is increasing resentment toward privileged, moralizing liberals who think that society's only problem is the lack of bike lanes and cultural diversity. The populist right is now seen as the only force not bound to the establishment and which is most prepared to challenge it aggressively. It bases its appeal on the dire situation for young people and an unflinching torching of liberal ideals, while the left and liberals bemoan the state of democracy, constitutionality and international law. For many on the left, simply stating this fact is sacrilegious. They simply do not see it and stubbornly refuse to accept it.

The Right-Wing Shift and the Gender Divide

This shift reflects a backlash against liberalism as the ***established orthodoxy*** of the past 30 years. Nowhere is this clearer than with young men. A popular sentiment among these youth is that white, cisgender, heterosexual men have been blamed for all of society's ills; that it has become taboo to talk about the problems of young men; that while one should be proud to be a woman, one should not be proud to be a man, that one should be ashamed to be a man; and that to be one of the "good guys," one must repent, be an "ally," unconditionally support everything that is done for a minority, be "aware of one's privileges," etc. Growing up in this context, being told you're the problem and still being faced with the brutal difficulty of making it in a society where material prospects and conditions are declining, ***cannot but lead to a backlash!*** To be clear: this does not mean justifying the backlash, but it does mean it must be explained in material terms.

The right, and the manosphere in particular, leans on these grievances and channels this anger into various reactionary outlets (see article page 17), while liberals simply brand such men as hopeless, unenlightened bigots and dismiss their concerns out of hand with abstract platitudes like "the world is already made for men." Many youth are becoming politicized in a climate dominated by this poisonous polarization between liberalism and right-wing populism. The left's failure to insert itself into this dynamic as an independent pole opposed to ***both*** the moralizing liberals and the right-wing populists has proven disastrous.

U.S. Army; Kenare/AFP

U.S./Israeli war on Iran. U.S. Army recruitment campaign.

What to Do?

So what should we do? The only way to effectively counter these different reactions is to offer a solution to the root problem and to show how these other outlets prevent young people from getting what they need. Young people need to study politics seriously, understand the laws governing this epoch and debate the way forward. Individual escape routes may well allow a few individuals to succeed, become wealthy or cross the crumbling bridge into academia or the liberal professions. But for the vast majority of youth, this path is closing. It is vital that youth integrate themselves into collective struggle rooted in the working class, including by their choice of jobs and by joining and organizing unions.

Above all, youth need to break with liberalism. Those who are serious about fighting the right must first free themselves from and take a clear stand against the ideology that fuels the right. Concretely, this also means breaking with the liberal mentality instilled in young people by the

"Critical Thinking" and the Morass of Liberal Pedagogy

BY FELIX SOKOLOV

The doctrine of "critical thinking" plays a key role in the dissemination of liberalism and the enforcement of the established (liberal) orthodoxy in schools. "Critical thinking" is, in a way, the passive-aggressive twin brother of cancel culture, adapted to the needs and conditions of the capitalist education system. One of its specific functions is to mask the fact that ***it is*** indoctrination. It obscures the fact that part of the purpose of school is to transmit an ideology, because it gives the impression that this is not the case. This is reflected in the name itself.

"Critical thinking" functions less as independent thought than as enforced conformity. Students are encouraged to be critical only of unacceptable ideas, while dissent from orthodoxy is framed as "bias," "untamed prejudice" or "ideological corruption," which students are taught to see as the very antithesis of being an enlightened, critically thinking being. After all, you're supposed to be free of bias—or at least "conscious" of it. Youth are supposed to be "above ideology"; they are supposed to approach every question as neutral observers, to see both sides, to proceed only from facts and evidence rather than one's ***material stakes*** in a conflict.

In the past, the dominant ideology could be transmitted to people in large part under the guise of religion. While this is still the case, the ruling class has added tools to its arsenal. Today the education and ideological indoctrination of the younger generation in the interests of capital is also carried out in part under the banner of "critical thinking." What this has in common with religion is that both are used as a cudgel against dissenting voices and as a means of ***deceiving*** people. This is a question I encounter pretty much every day at school in Toronto.

Let me illustrate. Recently, my French teacher organized a debate in my class about the ban on social media in Australia. I was strongly opposed to this measure (as was the majority of the class) and argued against it vehemently. My teacher was visibly frustrated and tried to get us to think about the "pros"—such as "fighting the algorithm," "protecting children," etc.—rather than "just seeing the cons." Of course this backfired as we ended up developing arguments to counter the so-called "pros."

The next day I walked into class and, lo and behold, we were to have another debate on the same topic, except this time my teacher had changed the question. Whereas the day before, the question was whether we were for or against the ban, today the question was "explain why the government is right to implement such a ban." No more having your own opinion! No more taking a clear stand! No more debating as a ***partisan*** with a stake in the issue! Seeing that I was indignant and visibly frustrated (and I wasn't the only one!), my teacher approached me, crouched down, and said in a paternalistic and condescending tone that he was "challenging" me, challenging all of us, to "think critically."

To be clear, we are obviously not against the idea of "critical thinking" in the abstract any more than we're against the idea of "diversity" or "multiculturalism" in the abstract. What we're opposed to is the usage of these ideas as ***political tools*** wielded by the ruling class to ***further its interests***.

The main talking point by the right wing on the education system is that it is indoctrination and about imparting liberal/woke ideology to the youth. They situate "critical thinking" in this context, correctly seeing it as a protective shield for this ideology. Liberals react hysterically to this by throwing around statements like "if you think learning critical thinking is indoctrination, then you're already lost, my friend." Unless the left exposes this doctrine honestly, the right will continue to monopolize opposition.

As Trotsky and Lenin both wrote, neither science nor education can be impartial in a society based on class antagonisms. Education is contradictory because it trains students while also transmitting the ideology of the ruling class. I encourage students and teachers to think critically about "critical thinking." ■

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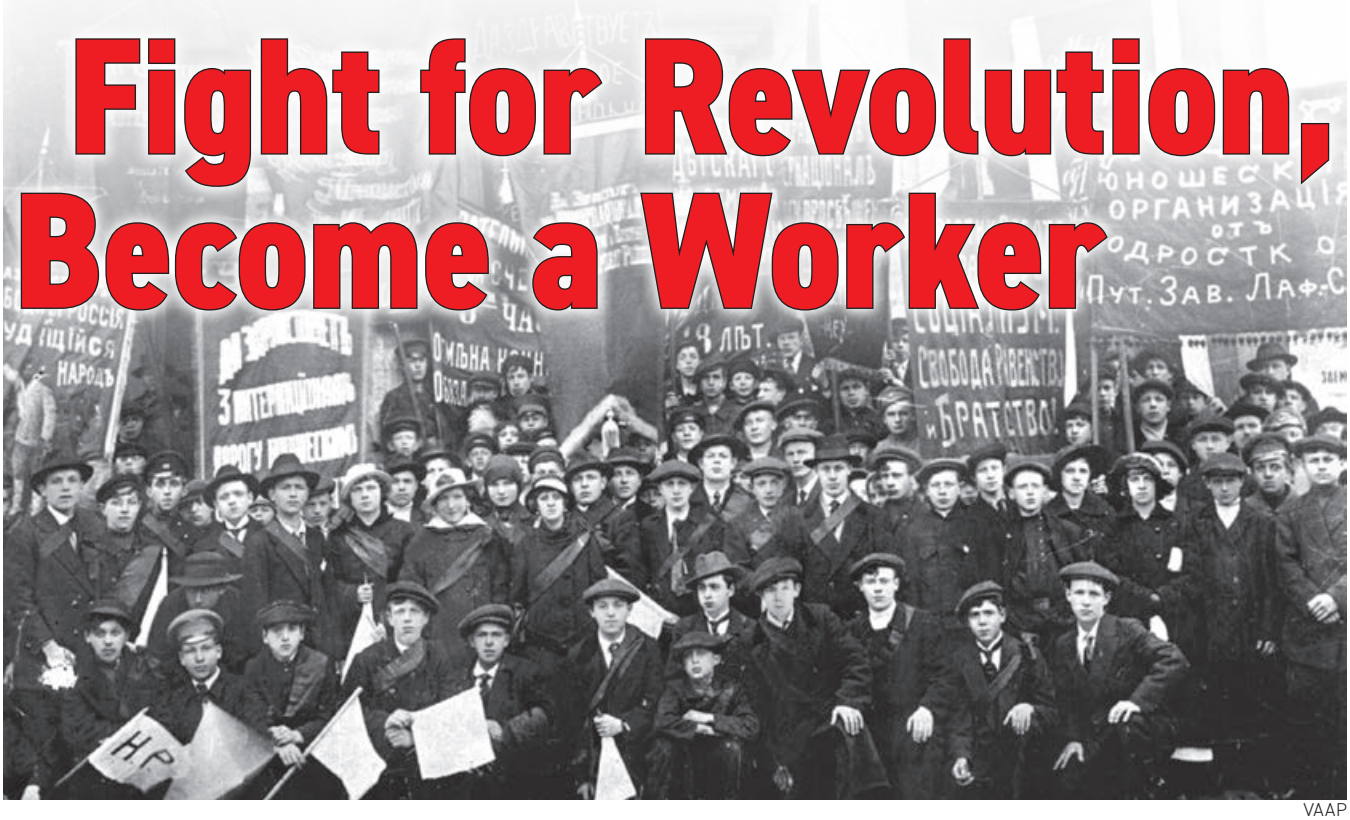
educational system, which stands in the way of this necessary struggle.

To alleviate the growing burden on young people, solve the housing crisis, secure decent jobs for all and pave the way for a real future, significant resources will have to be wrested from the hands of the ruling class. The fight for a future is therefore inseparable from the broader struggle against the system that produces these conditions, which today means above all a struggle against the U.S. empire. It is neither a fight to defend the decaying liberal world order nor a fight for a return to traditional values. In other words: the fight for the youth to have a future must be fused with—and can only advance under the banner of—the fight for workers' power and the defeat of imperialism. ■

An Appeal to Youth

Fight for Revolution, Become a Worker



VAAP

Russia, 1917: Young workers from Putilov factory participate in May Day demonstration.

The following is an ICL submission to the Meeting of Internationalist Forces scheduled for May 2026.

The future is bleak. The promises of education, social mobility and progress were lies. Everyone can see this. Many young people are looking to the left for an alternative. And many have joined revolutionary organizations. But there is a difference between becoming a communist with the promise of quick success and making a lifelong commitment to the cause of revolution.

As young radicals contemplate their choices, we in the ICL encourage them to turn away from the illusory prospects of a white-collar career and to join the ranks of the working class. Look to strategic industries such as manufacturing, logistics, transport and healthcare. For a communist, such a decision brings one's political and social existence into alignment. It makes fighting for the working class a concrete fact of life, not just an idea but a daily reality.

More than that, ***the movement needs young communist workers***. Marxists today have lost most of their influence in the workers movement. We need the current generation of young radicals to go to the working class and help rebuild this influence.

The Limits of Campus Radicalism

For decades, the center of gravity for leftist politics has been the campuses. When the liberal era of world politics was at its peak, there was a place within academia for leftist intellectuals, even a few Marxists. Still today, campuses provide a recruitment ground for communists.

But on the whole, the overwhelming focus of Marxists on universities has had disastrous consequences, pulling the movement in an increasingly liberal and petty-bourgeois direction, far removed from the realities and concerns of the working class.

We do not argue that campus politics are dead or should be abandoned. But we think it is well past time for communists to ***radically rebalance their priorities***. A revolutionary party must be forged through the fusion of declassed intellectuals and the vanguard of the working class. If we are to reach this vanguard, a certain proportion of young, declassed radicals needs to go to the workers. There is no getting around this if we are serious about building a revolutionary party.

Join the Working Class

For a young radical to get a working-class job is not only a good political choice but also reflects an objective necessity. As the number of unemployed graduates grows, some can still hope to pursue a white-collar career. But this road is closed to most. For them, the future lies in downward mobility: white-collar sweatshops, low-skill services, unemployment and proletarian jobs.

If this is the future for most graduates, why should so many young revolutionaries waste time at university, spending a fortune to get indoctrinated by bourgeois propaganda and learn unmarketable skills? Why not choose right now

to get a skill and look for a job in the most strategic sectors of the working class? The same can be said for those who already have a degree and are struggling to survive on the margins of society. Working-class jobs can offer better employment prospects at a time when many countries are chronically short of skilled manual and healthcare workers.

As millions of youth are turned away or blocked from careers requiring higher education, young communists are faced with a choice. Where will you go? What will you do with your life? Part of making this decision is understanding the limits of the choices on offer. A comfortable middle-class life is not a choice for the overwhelming majority. The decision, then, is whether you as an individual should follow the bulk of your generation into a proletarian future or struggle against the current in the hope of securing a job from the shrinking pool of middle-class occupations.

While the latter is not incompatible with dedicating your life to communism, the first is essential if we are to win the young generation of proletarians to communism.

Build the Unions

While the left has been overwhelmingly focused on campus activism, it has increasingly ignored serious trade-union work. Meanwhile, the situation in the unions is dire. On the one hand, there are the bureaucratic husks of the trade unions, despised by growing numbers of workers for their complicity in the bosses' attacks. On the other hand, in countries where the trade-union movement still shows signs of militancy, there are small pockets of working-class radicalism, all too often thrown into battle in isolation from the masses. Then there are the vast sectors of the economy where there are no unions.

There is a reason why revolutionaries were instrumental in building most unions, and why attempts to unionize giants like Amazon have so far failed. Conscious leadership is key. What is desperately needed everywhere is an infusion of young revolutionary cadre, determined to rebuild union power and fight the bureaucracy, but also to stand up to ultraleftism and substitutionism. The crusty leaders of the past are not up to the task. What is urgently needed is a new generation of combative trade-union leaders stepping up.

Existence and Consciousness

Getting a working-class job is not a moral question. Being a worker does not automatically make you class-conscious or a better person. What it does is bind your own life to the struggles and fate of the working class. There is no easy way out for a worker. Your conditions improve when everyone else's do. A defeat for the class is a defeat for you, impacting your own daily conditions. Being a worker brings politics out of the ivory tower and into the living experience of the class struggle.

While a communist worker can still resort to abstract formulas when confronting difficult problems, these formulas will come into direct conflict with material reality. The only way for a communist worker to influence co-workers is to provide real answers to the problems facing the workplace and society. This connection with the reality and consciousness of the working class is essential not just for individual communists but for any communist party worth its salt.

As Marxists, we understand that existence determines consciousness. This does not mean that a party that is organically connected to the proletariat will necessarily have all the right answers. But what is certain is that a party that lacks a living connection to the realities and consciousness of the working class cannot hope to offer concrete leadership to its struggles. Just as workers need the party for leadership, the party needs workers to remain anchored in material reality and a proletarian political perspective.

How are communists to undercut the rise of right-wing ideas in the working class if they remain totally out of touch with the realities of working people? We certainly cannot adapt our policies to backward consciousness, but nor can we artificially insulate ourselves from it. If there is any hope of pushing back against reaction, it must be confronted politically on the shop floor and not just from the comfort of the armchair.

Are You Really a Communist?

Every revolutionary, no matter their class origins, must break with the values and norms of their upbringing. No one is born a revolutionary. It is a conscious choice. Generally, it is in the personal realm that the question gets posed most sharply: parental expectations, family responsibilities and the demands of a non-political partner. As the long-term economic and social consequences of revolutionary engagement become more acutely posed, every communist must decide on their class allegiance and commitment.

Becoming a communist is not a purely intellectual process; it is also a material and social act. It means pushing social acceptability and personal interests to the background and placing one's existence at the service of a higher, historic cause. Very often, the questions of being an active member of a communist party and picking a profession get posed in tandem. This is normal. Choosing what you will do for a living (a privilege not available to most) concretely poses what you want to do with your life.

Deciding to become a communist worker fuses the question of livelihood with political commitment. It means abandoning the prospect of a petty-bourgeois career and tying your future to the working class.

For individuals brought up with the expectation of upward social mobility, it can often be easier to join a communist party than to become a worker. The first can be kept under wraps if necessary. The latter cannot. It means directly confronting family expectations and the stigma that the petty bourgeoisie puts on the working class. While this pressure is real, it does beg the question: how can one expect to fight for the working class through crises, wars and revolution if the prospect of living and working among the proletariat is too much to bear?

There is, of course, more than one road to becoming a communist. But at the current juncture, our appeal to young radicals is to not only dedicate their lives to proletarian emancipation but to do so as workers. ***There is no better revolutionary training than applying the principles of Marxism within the class struggle itself.*** And there is no greater need for the communist movement today than a steeled working-class cadre. ■

SPARTACIST
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Crushing the Red Pill

For Communist Struggle Against the Manosphere!

Viera/AFP

December 2025: Manosphere influencer Jake Paul is decisively crushed in a boxing match against Anthony Joshua. The moment went viral including among young people opposing red-pill ideology.

BY CASSIAN SINCLAIR

There are likely few young people today who have not encountered online content expressing unbridled hatred of women. Whether claiming that a woman's natural place is in the home, that sexual promiscuity is destroying society, or that men must reclaim their "natural," dominant role, the air is rife with gendered antipathy. Young men (and women) are bombarded with caustic talk of "alpha males" and masculinity in crisis. Influencers like Myron Gaines, Andrew Tate and Nick Fuentes have seen their followings rapidly expand through advocating violence against women, extolling the virtue of male hierarchies and preaching the subordination of all women as a social and biological necessity. Those who adhere to this program often describe themselves as having taken the "red pill."

The manosphere is certainly reactionary and misogynistic, but it is an ideological response to social conditions of unemployment, poverty and declining living standards facing young men today. The justified sense that one has no future is increasingly ubiquitous among young people, regardless of gender. It is not a question of ***if*** there will be radical responses to societal decline, since we see them happening already, but ***who*** will channel these sentiments, ***how*** they do this and to what ends. Socialists must be on the front lines of this battle.

To fight the manosphere requires proposing Marxist solutions to and leading struggles against capitalism, which creates the material roots of red-pill ideology. Moral platitudes that men should "be better" and "unlearn patriarchy" are hurled in abundance by liberals. These fail to address the ***underlying causes*** of misogynistic attitudes and only fuel polarization along lines of gender. This article seeks to begin developing a revolutionary answer to the manosphere by providing a counterposition to a few of its general tropes: the sense that society is rigged against men, support for "traditional" gender roles, and the "lone wolf/self-help" mindset as a means of overcoming social barriers.

"Society Is Rigged Against Men"

Central to the manosphere is the argument that men are systematically disadvantaged and despised, and that the main force responsible for this is feminism. Let's get one thing clear: women are and remain oppressed in relation to men by any measure in every country. That said, capitalist society ***does*** structurally disadvantage the majority of men, ***not*** because of their gender but because most men are workers. The ruling class depends on the exploitation of both men's and women's labor power to exist. Young men are expected to be reliable slaves, while the depredations of imperialism have pushed them out of good jobs and decent education, saddled them with insurmountable debt and trapped them in their parents' homes.

Still, this does not explain why these declining conditions have led men to blame their plight on women. This scapegoating stems from the fact that, for the tiniest layer of elite women, conditions ***did*** improve during the era of globalization. This layer was touted as a great success of neoliberalism,

while conditions for the majority of men and women deteriorated. The liberal establishment eagerly utilized "girlboss" feminism as window-dressing for a rotting society, telling exploited women that the "good life" was finally accessible even while they suffered unequal wages and discrimination. This ensured that the capitalists had the perfect scapegoat as a generation of men grew angrier over their own vanishing futures.

The liberal establishment concealed its attacks and silenced dissent by labeling men who protested crumbling conditions as bigots, while placating women and minorities by claiming that such "bigots" were the source of their problems. Behind the "culture wars" thus created, the rulers greedily plundered the oppressed.

Women & Revolution graphic

Becker & Bredel/ullstein bild

Society is not rigged against men per se but against the ***working class***. Men and women are both systematically exploited by the capitalists, while each is told to blame the other for their misery. Manosphere influencers, distorting this reality, engage in the same tactic—inverted. Instead of pointing to the capitalists, they insist that men blame women for the future being stolen from them. Reinforcing this divide will only make things worse for the oppressed.

The starting point must be a unified struggle to wrest resources from the common enemy responsible for worsening conditions: the capitalists. It is their endless hoarding of society's resources that leaves opportunities scarce and men and women battling over scraps. A basic measure would be to fight for jobs for everyone, not scant positions that set men and women at each other's throats.

Gender Roles and Misogyny in an Era of Decline

Manosphere figures strongly advocate "traditional" gender roles, often justified with extreme misogyny. A case in point is the following tweet from Andrew Tate (6 October 2025):

> "Your job as a man is to protect your woman from the world, from her own stupid ideas and provide for her so other men can't access her. It's not actually your job to be nice to her, make her laugh, or be her friend. Very much like a strict parent raises good kids."

No. 46
February 2025

iclfi.org/wr/46

We need to be very clear on where a line must be drawn. A man who says a woman's role in life is to shut up and obey her husband, or that she's too stupid to make her own decisions, is someone any decent worker should not engage with except to oppose in the strongest terms.

On the other hand, there are men attracted to the idea of a partner who can devote herself to household chores and raising children, just as there are women who are drawn to being homemakers. These gender roles and the oppressive relationships attached to them do not simply reflect bad ideas in people's heads; they stem from the social role of the monogamous family under capitalism. The family is the basic economic unit through which capitalism organizes and reproduces labor power. Women are burdened with most if not all of the domestic chores, while men are pushed to act as primary breadwinners and hardened overseers in the home. It is precisely this relationship that subordinates women and gives rise to misogyny. Figures like Andrew Tate eagerly utilize and magnify misogynistic attitudes to push men to play their assigned role and strengthen the family.

In these times of economic decline, people remain drawn to the family because it is one of the few means of social protection on which they can fall back. Manosphere influencers devote significant attention to reinforcing this connection between "tradition" and security. However, in reality the family is constantly eroded by the very system that relies on it. The rising cost of living makes the ideal of the nuclear family, where one partner works and the other keeps house, virtually impossible. For most families, both partners needing to work is not a matter of choice, and the notion of the "perfect homemaker" is simply an illusion.

Women's integration into the workforce is of course a progressive development. While the ruling class always attempts to use this to extract greater profits by depressing wages for all, wage work does provide women a vital measure of independence and pulls them out of the home to some degree. At the same time, it has an oppressive character, as it is increasingly driven by economic compulsion and occurs under exploitative conditions. Moreover, working women still carry most of the burden of household chores on top of their day job.

At the same time, fulfilling the traditional provider role is burdensome for men. On the dating scene, men without stable or lucrative jobs receive little interest, yet such jobs are scarce. This lack of interest is not because women are inherently "money motivated" but because they face the same economic pressures as men and are encouraged to seek stability in the domestic sphere.

In this decaying economy, how does shoving women back into the home address the grievances of struggling men? It is already difficult to secure and keep a job and support a family. If realized, the manosphere's program would only further impoverish young men forced to support multiple people on wages that barely sustain one, while denying women economic independence. Thus, traditional gender roles essentially act as an anchor keeping men and women down.

There ***is*** an alternative. Instead of returning to "traditional life" or suffering alone in a decaying economy, it is necessary to fight for a different society in which workers can make a real living and social conditions are substantially improved for all. For this to happen, women must be a central part of the struggle.

In contrast to this approach, both the manosphere and liberal feminism approach the struggles of men and women as a zero-sum game, where gains for one gender must mean losses for the other. This helps only the capitalists, who benefit from a workforce competing with each other and scrambling to survive. For men and women to provide and care for themselves and each other requires fighting collectively against those who own the means of production and for affordable housing, parental leave, free childcare and decent wages. Those battles are weakened when genders are set against each other.

"Pull Yourself Up by the Bootstraps"

As a remedy for eroding family structures and declining prospects, Andrew Tate advocates subjective self-improvement:

> "Focus on making yourself feel excited, powerful. Imagine yourself destroying goals with ease. You have to believe that you can achieve anything. You can become rich, you can become strong."
>
> —*Andrew Tate: Lesson 1—Procrastination: STOP BEING LAZY* (2022)

Cook/Reuters

September 2023: United Auto Workers pickets at General Motors Lansing Delta plant.

The danger here is more subtle. No one can be blamed for seeking personal development by learning, exercising, etc. But pursuing an extreme version of self-help as the ultimate answer to the problems of inequality and oppression means substituting an individualist "lone wolf" strategy for collective action. At work, it means isolation in the face of attacks by the bosses, pushing oneself for their profits in hopes of personal escape. Even if an individual rises above the lowest rung, the ***general*** social conditions immiserating men remain intact.

This approach also undermines workers' power to launch action against capitalists. On a picket line, "get ahead" thinking leads to scabbing and weakened cohesion. Accepting unsafe work or overworking oneself in hopes of outrunning societal decline only brings burnout.

Individualism also means standing aside when others come under attack. As bosses accelerate assaults on those most vulnerable—immigrants, minorities, youth and women workers—isolation leaves everyone weaker. If the specially oppressed can be victimized, anyone can be. We must plant the seeds of common defense, even in a difficult period.

* * *

The manosphere proceeds from real problems but pushes men toward reactionary aims. It cannot provide solutions and will only reproduce exploitation and oppression. It is not women who are the source of difficult times for men, but men and women's common capitalist exploiters. For working-class men to survive the coming storm, they must break with the manosphere and wage a unified struggle alongside oppressed women.

This does not mean simply fighting side by side for bread-and-butter issues. To build the necessary unity, women must know that their male co-workers will champion struggles against their oppression, for example, by fighting for equal pay and taking a stand against misogyny and violence toward women. This is in men's own direct interests: forging the strongest possible unity between men and women workers will maximize the chance of successful offensives against the common enemy. If the capitalists continue to divide and conquer, we will be crushed together. ■

How to Fight Misogyny in Schools

BY A LONDON TEACHER

The following article first appeared in Workers Hammer *No. 257 (Spring 2026).*

In December 2025 the Labour government declared violence against women and girls a "national emergency", committing to halving it in a decade by using "the full power of the state". The numbers are truly disturbing. According to the Office of National Statistics, instances of domestic abuse, which disproportionately affects women, more than doubled in England and Wales, going from 410,572 in 2016 to 889,918 in 2023. The reported instances of rape have shot up from 13,272 in March 2004 to 71,540 in March 2025. If we abide by the famous aphorism that the status of women is a measure of the progress of society, then Britain is most certainly going backwards.

But if the Labour government thinks that some symbolic declarations and posturing as a champion of women and girls will make us forget that its own cops rape and murder women (we haven't forgotten about Sarah Everard), that it supports the genocide of Palestinians, with women and children slaughtered in the tens of thousands, or that it cuts benefits for the most marginalised, or that it constantly gets on its knees for the misogynist-in-chief across the pond, then it has another thing coming. It is precisely because violence against women and girls is a burning problem that we need a ***real strategy*** to fight it! The conditions for women and girls will advance only if Broken Britain gets fixed.

Schools on the frontline

The growth of violence against women is happening in the context of the documented rise in misogyny among boys and young men, a reflection of the proliferation of the manosphere. Misogyny has become a mainstream topic since the release of *Adolescence* last year and Louis Theroux's *Inside the manosphere* this year. Both, whatever their flaws, put the spotlight on a real and growing problem: a wholesale social crisis facing young people and unfolding along gender lines.

Schools are a natural frontline of this crisis since this is where young people spend most of their time. Teachers report a rise in misogynistic comments and attitudes; many schools have done whole-school boys-only assemblies on Andrew Tate and the manosphere (because… of their chromosomes?); and more days are rolled out to train teachers in how to spot the signs of misogyny, how to talk to boys, how to talk about masculinity, and all sorts. (As if we didn't have enough reasons to quit the profession!)

Because schools are a major interface between youth and society, it is no surprise that they form a key component of the government's strategy to deal with misogyny, and that the National Education Union (NEU) has its own campaign on the issue. To say that both are hugely ill equipped to deal with the issue would be an understatement.

The liberal tautology

What exactly are the solutions on offer? The government wants to "empower" teachers and families to "address these harmful attitudes and behaviours", teach young boys how to "identify positive role models and challenge unhealthy myths about women and relationships", "arm children against disinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories", place children "displaying harmful behaviours…in behaviour change programmes" (!) and give police (unfortunately) and social services more "tools they need to intervene".

Alecu/Alamy

Government's liberal campaign won't stem Andrew Tate's anti-woman bigotry.

The NEU, for its part, does not put forward anything fundamentally different. "It's Not OK"—its campaign against sexism and sexual harassment—is a toolkit for educating young boys about healthy masculinity, how to challenge gender stereotypes, and how to make collages about masculinity or facilitate a session on body sculpting. (Don't worry, we are as confused as you are.)

Sounds good though, right?

Wrong. Both the NEU and the government view everything in terms of "teaching" misogyny out of the heads of boys. (The difference is that the government is willing to throw the "bad ones" into behaviour change programmes.) And as far as where that behaviour comes from, both agree that it's due to bad influences, exacerbated by social media.

We are left with a tautology: bad ideas (of the manosphere) are causing bad ideas (in the heads of boys). And, we will get good behaviour by modelling good behaviour. Simple, as if kids were lab monkeys. This logic perhaps explains why the government only pledged a measly £20 million for its solution, and why the union demands nothing and instead suggests nice charities which can come in to give workshops.

Epic Scotland Ltd/Alamy

Housing estate in Maryhill, Glasgow. One in three children in UK grows up in poverty.

Let's get real for a minute

A lot of education workers would welcome much of what is on offer. Partly because so little is done to deal with these problems, we're happy something is being done at all, and partly because we stay true to our vocation and genuinely think everything can improve through education. But the efficacy of these solutions must be judged by looking at the broader social and political context and with a clear understanding of what exactly is driving the growth of misogynistic attitudes.

Let's start with the broader context. The education system is crumbling from chronic underfunding. Academy trusts leech off school funding to pay their CEOs to turn schools into prisons. They implement completely draconian behaviour management regimes which are designed to instill submission but in fact breed defiance. Learning needs are through the roof, but there's not enough funding for Teaching Assistants. The number of students eligible for free school meals, meaning those from low-income families, continues to rise year on year, sitting at 25% of all students as of 2025. A lot of students in inner-city schools don't even have paper at home on which to do their homework!

Schools are simply not fit for purpose. As youth experience more hardship, school budgets are being slashed. They are not places where young people thrive. In fact, despite teachers working themselves to the bone, the education system is failing the majority of young people. Youth have few prospects after they finish school—good jobs are few and far between in Britain's stagnant economy. Youth crime is on the rise. On top of all this, going to university to stand a chance traps them in lifelong debt. The growth of misogynistic attitudes is taking place in the context of an entire society rotting from within. Youth in particular experience the brunt of it. And of course, it's the children of the working class who get it the worst.

The problem of misogyny is also inseparable from the rightward shift in politics nationally and internationally. It's no coincidence that the popularity of Andrew Tate parallels that of Reform UK and Tommy Robinson here. Or that the manosphere played a major role in getting Trump re-elected in the US, with harebrained bigots like Sneako attending the inauguration of the president of the most powerful country on the planet.

In this context, teaching "good ideas" and spreading "good vibes" in isolation from the crumbling education system, the rightward shift and the general decay of society is a ***complete non-starter***. No amount of good role models at school is enough to pull huge layers of youth out of the social and economic rot which surrounds them. For all the workshops teaching boys how harmful anti-woman ideas are, they leave school and go right out into society where everything we are trying to unteach them is reinforced.

This vicious cycle won't be broken by ideas alone. If teachers could change the world through just teaching, we would have done so by now. We are dealing with a deep-going social problem. To moralise at young and often defiant boys without going to the root of the problem will not work. In fact, it will very likely backfire and push them further into the arms of the very reactionaries who grow their clout by rejecting the do-gooder vibes the government and the union are pushing. We cannot win this battle if we keep using tools which are clearly broken. To save boys from the manosphere, something will need to give.

Why so much misogyny?

Before we proceed to what that is, we need to take up social media, the culprit everyone loves to blame for all the ills of youth. Yes, social media has made it easier for red-pill content to proliferate amongst young boys. But young boys are not idiots who will believe anything they are told.

There is a reason why such content strikes a chord with them, why it's popular, and why it pulls them deeper into the manosphere. It's because their social and material circumstances are driving them to look for a "red pill" for something which explains why everything is stacked against

them—from detentions every day to poor grades, terrible school dinners, pressures around dating and being liked, disappearing social spaces, neglect, family problems, an overcrowded flat, lack of privacy, impending social media bans and a whole host of other things.

They are looking for an escape, for a quick way out. (Ever wonder why young boys from nice liberal middle-class homes are usually not the types who like the manosphere, but it's the ones from the estates?) So, when bigots like HSTikkyTokky talk about "the system" and "the colluding powers at the top of the world that want to keep everyone down, keep everyone broke, keep the slave mindset going"—this rings true for them. Hell, he's right! The problem is that this one piece of truth gets laced with misogyny, chauvinism, anti-Semitism and scam trading schemes which give these reactionaries their millions.

With everything working against them and nothing to pull them back, young boys get sucked deeper into the manosphere pipeline, ultimately buying into the poisonous misogyny which tells them that their masculinity rests on the submission and humiliation of girls and women. It can go from inane things like rage-baiting teachers for banter during lessons to using homophobic and transphobic slurs against others to assert their own manliness, to upskirting and sharing nudes because for them, girls become mere playthings.

To blame social media for the growth of misogyny is not only dim but serves a political purpose: if the problem is only based on bad ideas and social media, then there's no need to spend any real money on fixing anything. Instead, the government can entertain banning social media to save girls, or just extol the virtues of having good role models to fight the manosphere, and if all else fails, give the police more powers. In other words, it can get away with doing nothing that's good and more of what's terrible. Social media is a symptom, not the cause. And to fight the cause we need to qualitatively improve the lives of young people so they have no need to turn to reactionary answers. ***This means improving the entire country, starting with schools.***

The union needs to get it together!

This is where the NEU comes in. It wants to "save education". Good. But what does this look like and how will the union fight for it? Education will only be saved through massive funding, which can provide children with what they need to succeed—smaller classes so they can have real attention from teachers, additional support for all their learning needs, free meals, enough leisure time, etc. It will be saved when education workers have a huge reduction in workload and better conditions so that they don't quit due to burnout. It will be saved when schools are back in public hands and not under the control of parasitic academies. It will be saved when behaviour regimentation is no longer the means to stem the social crisis engulfing Britain.

All of this requires a fundamentally different game plan. Annual campaigns for more pay simply won't cut it, nor will liberal campaigns promoting teaching good ideas to bad boys. Teaching is a woman-dominated sector. This means the union must take up the fight against misogyny as one of its core planks, not just go along with government plans to train already overworked teachers to have more empathy for boys taking the mick. Yes, we want to fight misogyny. But this shouldn't be through our emotional labour. Rather, it should be through a struggle against the existing set-up of education linked to the fight against the social crisis confronting youth.

This is not as impossible as it sounds. The fight against the current education set-up starts with your school, and it starts with building the union at your school:

1) Join the union, recruit others and make the union your voice on the job.
2) Take a collective stand against workload creep—if you refuse together, management can't do anything about it.
3) Fight against strict behaviour policies—giving a million detentions will only fuel more tension between teachers and students.
4) Oppose senior management being in the union—and pressure the union to agree to this.
5) Build teacher-student unity—schools are failing both of you, and you are natural allies in fighting to change them.

Of course, these on their own do not solve the problem of misogyny in schools, let alone society. Misogynist attitudes must be challenged. Our problem isn't that the government and the union seek to do this. It's that they do this with methods which breed cynicism and invite a conservative backlash. In the case of the government, it pushes a cheap moralising propaganda campaign while overseeing the destruction of living standards. The NEU, for its part, echoes the government's campaign and offers no challenge to the status quo in schools.

The fight against misogyny will succeed to the extent that the fight for better schools, a better future for children and a better society succeeds. Only in the course of such a struggle will progressive ideas about gender actually find fertile ground. For this, the NEU needs to get it together and rethink its strategy to save education. ■

Adolescence
A Snapshot of Rotting Britain

BY MANSA KAUR

Adolescence is an excellent watch, and a must-watch. Brilliant acting to go with a powerful story depicting the deep rot eating away at the heart of Britain, and which does so in a heart-wrenching, relatable and, dare I say it, nuanced way. Set in a Northern town, the story follows the case of Jamie Miller, a 13-year-old arrested in a police raid in the wee hours of the morning for killing Katie, a classmate, the night before. In four uncut and unedited episodes, the audience is taken through the events which unfold from multiple vantage points: Jamie himself, his family, the school, the child psychologist, the social reactions, and the lives of youth which are indecipherable to most adults and parents. The backdrop against which it all plays out is, of course, Broken Britain.

Stephen Graham, the lead actor and one of the writers, conceived of it after reflecting on recent instances of violence against young girls by young boys. In 2021, Ava White, a 12-year-old, was stabbed to death by a 14-year-old boy in Liverpool, the city Graham calls home. In 2023, 15-year-old Elianne Andam was stabbed by 17-year-old Hassan Sentamu outside London. These are just two cases from a growing number. A *Guardian* article points out that the drama was released just as news was emerging that "crossbow killer Kyle Clifford had searched online for misogynistic podcasts and watched Andrew Tate videos hours before murdering three female members of the Hunt family [his ex-girlfriend]" (17 March 2025).

Adolescence is currently the second-most-viewed English-language show on Netflix. It strikes a chord with huge layers, certainly in Britain but more generally in the West: youth see their experience reflected in it, and parents see in it the challenges of raising children and ensuring their safety and well-being in an increasingly difficult social climate. Hell, it even "hit home" for Sir Keir Starmer, who was so moved by it that he forgot about the thousands of young girls being genocided in Palestine or their mothers being raped by Israeli soldiers.

The popularity of *Adolescence* has allowed liberals (and the right) to use it to justify crackdowns on social media to "protect the young" from "online radicalization." *Adolescence* does not advocate bans, it merely depicts social media as young people use it. But it also depicts other things that the liberals are completely silent about. For example, the state of the school where Jamie and Katie went was marked by chaos, overwhelmed and exhausted teachers and horrible behavior. Yet no liberal has gone on a crusade to fix schools—a measure which could ***actually*** help youth.

What is happening is that the liberals are applying their own prejudice to the show, selecting and ignoring elements to suit their political aims. For instance, governments in Europe—Britain, France and the Netherlands—are integrating it into national school curricula as a means of combating misogyny and the influence of the manosphere. In Britain, it is part of the government's strategy for combating violence against girls and women. As our article on misogyny in schools argues, these are entirely empty gestures that fail to address the decaying social conditions amid which young people are growing up. The only good thing about this strategy is that kids can miss some lessons to watch a good show.

There is a lot to be said about the show. Yes, it could have done this or that thing better. But our point in writing about *Adolescence* is not to dig into its creative and storytelling merits, but to insist on ***what to do*** about the social reality it depicts. A sentiment frequently expressed upon watching the show is one of being overwhelmed and feeling that nothing can be done. One is left wondering that if someone like Jamie—a smart kid with loving parents and a decent home—can end up stabbing a girl to death, then what are we to do? What chance do we have of dealing with this generalized crisis facing youth?

This is a valid question. From the outside, Jamie was a "normal" kid. His plumber dad tried his hardest to do right by his kids, as plenty of working-class parents do. Yet it wasn't enough. It is this reality that generates anxiety and exasperation, and it is precisely why solutions such as bans and restrictions appeal to people, especially parents who want to protect their kids. But youth do not live in a bubble. No matter how much their parents try to shelter them, kids go out into a society that is in decay.

This is our point. This is the struggle to be had with concerned teachers and working-class parents. As the show becomes a reference point for the crisis confronting youth in Britain, communists must seek to advance the conversation along the lines of ***how to improve the social conditions in which youth are being socialized***. This is the only way to prevent further tragedies like those of Ava White and Elianne Andam. ■

Youth, Sex, Morality & Why We No Longer Oppose the Age of Consent

The following article was written by Ñico Connelly and approved for publication by the International Executive Committee of the ICL.

In this decaying society, no one is feeling the ground erode under their feet quite as quickly as youth. And as their futures grow bleaker, they struggle to become independent and their reliance on adults increases. This anxiety expresses itself most acutely on the terrain of sex. Every child abuse scandal that goes viral only solidifies this feeling further. However, this legitimate fear is being successfully channeled by the ruling class to fuel its reactionary political aims. This is best exemplified by the far-right QAnon conspiracy movement and its growing influence on right-wing politics, where accusations of grooming and pedophilia become a potent weapon with which to attack anyone to the left of MAGA ("Make America Great Again").

To fight against the abuse of children, we must untangle the right's aggressive moral offensive from the crimes committed against youth. Both wings of the ruling class weaponize accusations of child abuse and pedophilia to ram through bans on porn, phones and puberty blockers, or attacks against immigrants—all with the consent of large layers of the population. But the only effective way to combat child abuse is to ***attack its social roots***. This means fighting for youth to be more integrated into society and defending their right to make decisions about their own lives and bodies.

In addressing these important questions, this article also corrects our previous approach to issues of sex and morality. In the name of opposing the encroaching forces of reaction, we opposed age of consent laws on principle. This approach was based on a blanket opposition to state intervention in the bedroom, without taking into account the social reality in which these laws are being applied. Crucially, this position offered no way to deal with the real abuse of young people and advocated stripping a protective measure that gives them a legal means to fight back. Such a strategy only enflames the legitimate fears of youth and reinforces conservative impulses.

Ruling Class Hypocrisy and "Protecting Children"

Internationally, the bourgeoisie is faced with a rapidly deteriorating world situation that increasingly compels them to resort to force to push through their interests. But coercion alone is not enough. They must also legitimize their class interests by invoking "universal values," and so they rely on moral campaigns, drawing from the reservoir of conservatism in society to build a durable base of social support. Behind the lofty moral claims of the ruling class is always plain self-interest looking for camouflage.

One of the main flashpoints in the bourgeoisie's moral offensive is the protection of children. Children are the most vulnerable members of any society and their growth into functioning adults is essential for society's survival. Thus it is universally recognized as the most morally repugnant crime to hurt children and especially to misuse one's authority over a child to hurt them. The reality of child abuse makes it easier for the ruling class to justify direct and coercive interventions by invoking the protection of children. This is particularly useful when pursuing its interests requires forceful measures.

The same ruling elite that facilitates the genocide in Gaza or bombs

Vernon Lewis Gallery/Alamy

Nolly/ZUMA

Left: WWII propaganda poster. Right: Republican U.S. Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene opposes gender-affirming care for minors at September 2022 press conference.

girls' schools in Iran cloaks its repression at home in the rhetoric of "protecting our children" to enforce unquestioning compliance. Meanwhile, they attack what remains of the social safety net so that children grow up in a time when medical care, education, or simply paying rent becomes a one-way ticket to a lifetime of debt. They ban youth from having access to their phones or social media, further increasing young people's isolation from society and each other. They push society toward crisis and war and turn youth into cannon fodder before they're even old enough to drink. Meanwhile, actual abusers are most likely to be the adults that children are taught never to oppose or resist because they "have your best interests at heart," while children themselves are "too young to understand."

What is the ruling class "protecting" children from? Not poverty, depression, or war. And not from adults who take advantage of the ruling class's own logic that youth need a firm hand to control them in the name of protecting them. The bourgeoisie may cloak themselves in moral absolutes, but they "protect" children only insofar as it aligns with their interests.

Youth Oppression and Abuse

The social climate is marked by heightened awareness of child sexual abuse, reinforced by constant scandals. Insofar as this sentiment is directed against the conditions that maintain youth oppression, it can become a powerful lever to draw youth into the revolutionary movement. However, as the situation currently stands, this sentiment is being mobilized by the bourgeoisie to ***deepen*** the dependence and vulnerability of children.

To understand how to fight this, we need to first understand where child abuse comes from. When the ruling class invokes it, it does so by pushing a very specific myth of what abuse looks like, construing it as a sudden and random event committed by a stranger and preventable with sufficient vigilance. But in reality, most abuse is committed by someone the child knows and trusts, in private, and involves coercion and dependence, not just sudden violence. Increasing the control of parents and the state over the lives of children as a way to "protect" them maintains the social conditions out of which abuse grows.

So long as our society is defined by oppression and exploitation, there will be violence, both open and hidden, against youth. The more vulnerable youth are, the more powerless they are in the face of abusers. It is no coincidence that abuse is most common in cases where the power imbalance is very high. Just look at the Epstein case (see page 32), the epidemic of sexual abuse in the Catholic church or the high number of such occurrences within families.

Abuse happens precisely because of the isolation and dependence of youth. It is not hard to figure out how such abuse remains secret when a parent, teacher, or priest (not to mention a cop), the very people children are taught never to question or disobey, mistreats them. Most abuse happens within the family, where children are completely dependent on parents and elders for even developing their sense of what "normal" is. Most children are severely unequipped to even register abuse because they have limited social awareness of boundaries or won't assert them for fear of being punished for disobedience or resisting authority. If a child realizes that something about their relationship with a particular adult doesn't match up with their relationship with others, their only recourse is often to appeal to other authority figures. Abuse must be understood as a ***consequence of patriarchal social relations.***

Ghaedi/Anadolu

March 20: Iranians commemorate victims of U.S.-Israeli bombing of girls' primary school in Minab, Hormozgan province.

The most effective methods for fighting abuse are those that empower youth by ***giving them the means to exercise their bodily autonomy.*** Reducing their dependence on one or two overburdened caregivers would ensure they have places to go beyond home or school and access to a support system outside of their immediate family. Often, access to society outside the home is how youth realize that something unhealthy is going on in their home life. Access to jobs allows them to become more financially independent, develop responsibility and become the social equals of adults for the first time in their lives. Available apartments and affordable rents would enable them to move out of abusive situations. Likewise, access to affordable transportation provides the freedom to leave and travel. Sex education, contraception and free abortion on demand would help reduce the likelihood of unwanted pregnancies that can ruin a young person's life before they've even had the chance to live independently.

All these measures would give youth the material means to make decisions for themselves and develop the experience and confidence to live independently. However, such measures are tied to the level of economic and social development of society at large and show the strong relationship between youth freedom and the conditions of the working masses. For revolutionaries, protecting young people thus means fighting to achieve these measures by ***tying the fate of youth to that of the working class in the struggle against capitalist decay.***

Youth, Bodily Autonomy and Consent

The ruling class has been able to successfully target and roll back the rights of youth in the name of "fighting abuse." Many young people and their parents also support restrictive measures out of a legitimate desire to ensure children and teens aren't harmed and because they see no other way to protect them. However, taking the law as the basis of one's moral compass and accepting that youth under 18 have no right to make decisions about their own bodies is a real concession to the arguments used to keep youth dependent

Akio Kon/Bloomberg

Wittman/NY Times

You're old enough to be exploited or serve in the military, but too young to vote or make decisions about your own body.

and vulnerable. This is exactly why the right focuses its transphobic reaction on children, arguing that the state and parents need to step in and control them.

Marjorie Taylor Greene exploited exactly this conception to advocate banning gender-affirming care for minors: "Pass my Protect Children's Innocence Act to stop communist groomers like this from using state government power to take children away from their parents to allow a for-profit medical industry to chop off these confused children's genitals before they are even old enough to vote" (X.com, 22 November 2022).

Yet the ruling class's own laws contradict the idea of a "universal" age when youth are ready to make decisions for themselves. In almost every country, minors can be exploited as workers before they can participate in the democratic process. In the U.S., youth can legally get blown up fighting in defense of the petrodollar before they can have a drink or smoke something to take the edge off. This inconsistency applies especially to questions of sex and consent. Although most countries restrict sex based on age, they cannot agree on what age youth are ready to have sex. In Kuwait, all sex outside marriage is criminalized. In California, someone under 18 cannot legally consent to sex but can get married with court approval, i.e., they can only give consent within the framework of marriage. Meanwhile, just next door in Nevada, the age of consent is 16. How can a relationship be consensual in one state and then criminal just across the border? Such an approach, based on arbitrary legal ages set by 80-year-old politicians, cannot determine when each individual is ready to take that step.

But if the law doesn't provide a clear basis to judge when young people have made a genuine decision for themselves, what does? The subject of youth and bodily autonomy is much more complex than the black-and-white premises of bourgeois morality. Youth is a natural period of development where there are lots of social changes, like becoming more independent and socially integrated, as well as biological changes such as puberty, during which one forms sexual capability. Youth go through a long period of socialization—the process by which they learn to navigate society—which is, in turn, conditioned by their social exposure. Their limited social experience and the oppressive nature of our society necessarily make youth sex rife with gray areas.

Yet there remains a fundamental line between consent and coercion. Coercion involves the use of pressure, threats, manipulation, intimidation, or abuse of power to obtain sex from someone who does not freely consent. Consent consists of the knowledge of what you are consenting to and the social meaning of that act. It also means understanding the ***constraints*** on your decisions. For a young person, this means being aware of the social taboo against a relationship between themselves and an older person. It also means being aware of their own limitations in a given situation, such as whether they can revoke consent at any time, leave, or resist. For instance, a young child may be curious about the human body but have no understanding of what sex is and how an older, more socially aware person is using them. This is very different from a teenager with a crush on their teacher, fully aware of the power dynamic between them and the taboo their teacher would be breaking if they were to respond.

When disentangling the complicated knot of consent and coercion in the lives of young people, we should make no concessions to the hysterics of capitalist politicians. However, the dominant ideas among young people do often reflect the moral campaigns of the ruling class. Youth often invoke the law as a moral absolute to justify restrictions on minors and some even support bans on social media in the name of "protecting mental health" and "fighting groomers." Young people who want to fight abuse cannot do so based on acquiescing to the ruling class's morality. The bourgeoisie seeks to raise the next generation as automatons who know nothing but isolation and obedience and whom they can deploy as soldiers or minimum-wage workers to keep their crumbling system running. We must reject not only their political attacks but their whole moral framework in order to fight back.

Why We No Longer Oppose Age of Consent Laws

Our own party has long had an un-Marxist approach to the question of youth sexuality. Beginning from opposition to the bourgeoisie's hypocritical cries to "protect the children," we proceeded directly from abstract principles against the capitalist state to a concrete policy of abolishing all age of consent laws. Why was this?

Our position did start from some correct premises, namely that the capitalist state isn't benevolent or neutral but a tool of class oppression, and that we should be guided by the freely made decisions of young people, i.e., effective consent. So we argued that state intervention is unjustified in cases of "crimes without victims"—acts considered by law

to be crimes but where neither party feels they have been harmed. That includes sex between consenting people that is criminalized purely due to an age difference. We focused on whether there was effective consent to determine if a particular encounter was consensual or rape, rather than an arbitrary age enshrined in law.

Our approach was a product of the radical sexual attitudes of the 1960s and ’70s. In a context of escalating class struggle, military defeats of imperialism and growing radicalism, it was possible to throw off the yoke of the repressive sexual and social practices of the ’50s. But following the defeat of U.S. imperialism in the Vietnam War, the American bourgeoisie embarked on aggressive moral campaigns to recover politically, such as supporting Anita Bryant’s “Save Our Children” crusade against gays.

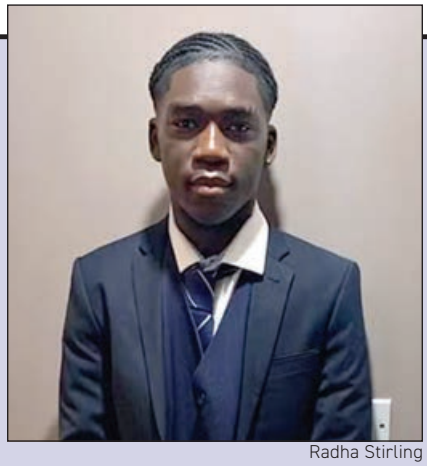
To defend the left in a period where politics were moving to the right, Marxists needed to address the limitations of the sexual revolution. For example, its focus on social rebellion and changing cultural and social attitudes to sex, but without altering the social relations at the root of youth oppression, paved the way for a backlash. When the bourgeoisie seized on real sexual crimes to bolster its attacks, we became increasingly defensive and sought to uphold the values of a waning counterculture by defending a sexually libertarian perspective. Seeking to stand against the conservative climate and the bourgeoisie’s moral campaigns, we assumed the best of some individuals facing accusations, which led us to take flatly wrong and reprehensible positions on cases of sexual assault such as that of Roman Polanski (see page 29).

Our approach reflected an inability to deal with social reality. We did not merely point out the hypocrisy of age of consent laws, that they offer only limited means to protect against abuse, or that their invocation in cases of clear consensual sex should be opposed. The problem is that we began from an abstract principle against the state and took this directly to a ***blanket position for the immediate abolition of these laws under capitalism***. This provokes a very defensive reaction from youth and frankly most people in society, who often hear about youth and sexuality primarily in the context of heinous abuse cases. This reaction reflects the prevalence of abuse and the enduring power dynamics between youth and adults under capitalism.

Our opposition to age of consent laws was based on opposing government intervention in cases where there was no clear-cut rape and neither partner involved claimed they had been a victim of abuse. However, it’s very difficult to apply the concept of effective consent to the lives of young people, since power dynamics and social taboos overlap with and are often the result of age. Most of the time, what an outsider would call abuse is the only thing a child has been exposed to in their short life. The power dynamic between people is not something you can opt out of; it is the result of a complicated mix of natural, social and even emotional factors that make determining consent between youth and adults a massive gray area.

Marxists start from the understanding that “right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development which this determines” (Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875), meaning that laws reflect economic and cultural development, not the other way around. We could demand “government out of the bedroom,”

Marcus Fakana
2006–2025



Radha Stirling

18-year-old British teenager Marcus Fakana was arrested and imprisoned in 2024 “over a consensual holiday relationship with another British tourist who was just months younger than him, a fact he was not aware of at the time” (detainedindubai.org, 7 July 2025). Reports indicate that they hit it off and intended to continue seeing each other when back in London. However, the girl’s mother found out about their relations and upon returning to the UK, reported Fakana to the authorities in the UAE where he still remained. He was sentenced to 1 year in a Dubai prison for breaking the country’s age of consent laws, which deem consensual sexual activity with anyone under 18 a criminal offence, regardless of the circumstances. When interrogated, Fakana said it didn’t occur to him to think about the girl’s age since they were in the same school year. And rightly so. Moreover, the age of consent in Britain is 16!

Fakana’s case was met with an outpouring of sympathy, especially amongst youth in London and especially in the black community. The case highlighted how youth who break social and sexual mores face even more scrutiny and hate when they come from marginalized communities. Fakana’s family waged a campaign to the British government, calling on their local MP, then Foreign Secretary David Lammy, to put pressure on the Emirati monarchy to pardon their son. Lammy, a black establishment man, while promising that Fakana would be given “all the full support available,” also scolded the young man for not following the rules of other countries.

After a long ordeal as well as financial hardship for the family, Fakana was eventually given a royal pardon. Three months after returning to the UK, he tragically died in a car accident. We remember Marcus Fakana as a youth who lost valuable time of his short life for accidently offending the conservative sensibilities of an arch-reactionary monarchical state.

but this will not change the social relations between adults and children (or men and women) which produce sexual abuse and in turn lead people to seek state intervention as an answer. It is idealist to begin from the premise that changing laws will allow youth to exercise real bodily autonomy while they remain dependent social beings. No one slogan can equip us to deal with the complex social reality surrounding youth sex.

Tama/Getty

Skid Row, Los Angeles, 2019: Children growing up in poverty wait in line for donated shoes and school supplies.

Marxists and Morality

We believe the act of someone giving, refusing, or being unable to provide informed consent is the most important factor in determining whether sex is consensual or rape, not whether one's parents or the government think an individual should be capable of giving consent. However, we do not oppose the rights of victimized children to use age of consent laws to eke out whatever justice they can get from the capitalist legal system.

Our job as Marxists is not to play God and claim that in the massive gray zone that is youth sex, we can determine what's good or bad sex, what is or isn't consent. Our job is to build a revolutionary party by putting forward clear political lines that advance the interests of the working class. We have a political attitude toward sex only insofar as it is relevant to advancing the class struggle—for example, when the ruling class uses it to foment reaction or when it's necessary to oppose a witchhunt as part of defending the rights of the oppressed as a whole. Sometimes, questions of gender and sexuality are relevant, such as when the right weaponizes "grooming" slanders to embark on an all-sided offensive against trans people.

However, as revolutionaries, our morals and our program will necessarily be far from those of the majority of society. We should not unnecessarily aggravate this gap, particularly in a way that replaces polarization over politics and class with one over social attitudes. We will always lose in such situations. We can only combat these attitudes by showing how they hold back the struggles of youth and the working class, not by resorting to abstract principles.

For communists, our morality, which is our general outlook on society, is tied to our program—what we seek to fight against and what we fight *for*. However, ***morality and program are not the same thing***. We oppose many things under capitalism because we recognize their role in maintaining the oppression and subservience of the masses: the capitalist state, the patriarchal family, religion and even the repression of youth. The question is ***how*** to fight these things.

At the same time that Marxists recognize religion as an instrument to defend exploitation, we argue against raising atheism as a central slogan of the revolutionary party, i.e., declaring war on religion, because this would only stimulate militant clericalism. Engels recognized that to really free the masses from religion requires drawing the widest layers of the working class into the class struggle. This would allow them to draw the conclusion from their own experience that ***religion holds their struggle back***. This doesn't mean that our political aim is no longer to combat religion. But this cannot be done by starting from abstract principles and preaching about how religion is reactionary. We can only eliminate religion by attacking its ***social roots***, the degrading conditions that lead people to cling to salvation in the next life. Only by drawing the masses into a concrete, collective struggle against the capitalist class and its rule, which forms the basis of their daily hardship, can we render religion obsolete.

The question of age of consent laws is similar. Our job as Marxists is to draw youth into the working-class struggle against capitalism in order to target the social roots of their oppression and eventually render these laws obsolete. This will only be done by targeting those repressive laws and practices which are the most concentrated expression of youth oppression, and where there is actual sentiment to fight back. The position we are rejecting created additional and substantial obstacles to drawing youth into the class struggle by confronting them in an extremely rigid manner on the terrain of their highly personal social attitudes about sex. It is not uncommon for political opponents (both left and right) to resort to the moral toolkit of the bourgeoisie and smear revolutionaries with positions that run counter to the dominant morality as a way to divert attention from what is needed to advance a particular struggle. While this tactic needs to be exposed, we should not make their job any easier. Revolutionaries must stand firm on communist morality, but should also minimize drawing lines over secondary issues that are bound to lead to a backlash.

Today, youth generally do not view the age of consent as specifically oppressive. Declaring war on it is just as counterproductive as declaring war on religion. Abolishing the age of consent means stripping young people of a legal protection without providing any other means to fight against or remove themselves from abuse. ***How*** we fight against youth oppression matters. The problem is not merely the social

continued on page 30

A WORD FROM COMRADE LENIN

The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion

iclfi.org/wr/46/lenin

Why It Was Wrong to Defend Roman Polanski

The following article was written by G. Perrault and approved for publication by the International Executive Committee of the ICL.

The ICL's recent political re-orientation has made our political interventions in the class struggle more effective, often exerting real pressure on reformist forces in the workers movement. In such cases, the response to our arguments is commonly to invoke an article written in *Workers Vanguard* in February 1978 entitled "Stop the Puritan Witchhunt Against Roman Polanski!" (*WV* No. 192). As the headline suggests, the article defended Roman Polanski against the charge that he raped 13-year-old Samantha Geimer (then Gailey).

Raising this article from almost fifty years ago in the context of struggles pertaining to today is a transparent way to sidestep our arguments and shut us up. However, if this line of attack is available to our political opponents, it is due to mistakes of our own making: ***we should not have defended Roman Polanski***. Moreover, the more we were criticized for this, the more we doubled down, even dismissing clear evidence indicating we were wrong (see *WV* No. 1135, 1 June 2018). Our position was viewed almost as a test of faith and proof of our ability to stand up to bourgeois moral pressure.

We know that correcting our position today will not stop our critics; it is always easier to slander than to respond to Marxist arguments. But as the saying goes, when you are in a hole, stop digging. Forty-eight years later, we explain how we got it so wrong on Polanski.

The Polanski Case According to Geimer

There are cases where an underage person consciously and freely consents to sex with someone who is an adult in the eyes of the law. But this was ***not*** what happened in the case of Polanski and Samantha Geimer. In a 2013 interview with *Der Spiegel,* Geimer describes the events of 1977 as follows:

> "I didn't know how to stop him. I had told him that I didn't want to go into that room. When he touched me, I said no. But when 'no' didn't work, I didn't know what to do anymore. 'Let him do it,' I thought, 'and then I'll go home'."

She goes on to say:

> "I didn't want it. I tried to say no. That makes it rape. Did I think it was rape at the time? No. I thought rape meant physical violence or kidnapping. Then I got home and everyone was shouting: 'You're 13. It's rape!' I was really surprised."

Geimer's account leaves little doubt that Polanski abused his power and raped her. However, the events of that night were only the start of her nightmare. The 2008 documentary *Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired* depicts how the infernal wheels of the judiciary and Hollywood press began to turn after Polanski's arrest. The judge was first and foremost interested in his media coverage, toying with both the defense and the prosecution to make a show. This saga had nothing to do with getting justice for Samantha Geimer and made her life a living hell.

In her *Spiegel* interview Geimer responds to how she has been portrayed in the media and describes how she felt about her ordeal:

> Geimer: "At any rate, I was never as devastated and traumatized as people claimed I was. What I still don't understand is that if everyone felt that what Roman did was so terrible, why do they still want to see me as a deeply traumatized victim? Oh, Polanski did this to you—but why, then, aren't you in worse shape?"
>
> SPIEGEL: "We don't understand that."
>
> Geimer: "I'm also a feminist. I understand the motives of the women who attacked me publicly. But they wanted me to feel like a victim, because only a deeply hurt victim could truly benefit them and their cause. But I wasn't one. To this day, I don't feel that I was a victim of Roman, but rather a victim of the public, the courts and the media. That explains this book and this interview."

When the journalist confronted Geimer for minimizing the significance of Polanski having sex with a 13-year-old girl she explained:

> "Today it's hard to imagine what the mood was like in the late '70's, especially in Hollywood. Elvis Presley had married Priscilla in the '60's. She was 14 when Elvis met her. Woody Allen's 'Manhattan' was an homage to a middle-aged man in love with a teenager. I saw a photo of Don Johnson with his later wife Melanie Griffith sitting on his lap. She was 14 when they met. The girl who becomes a woman was no taboo. The term child abuse didn't exist. Or at least no one talked about it.…
>
> "There is no justification. Roman should have known better. But you have to recognize that people behaved somewhat differently at the time when it came to sexual matters. Roman believed, as he said later on, that his actions had been based on warmth and affection. And you know what? I believe him. Condemning it from today's perspective is ignoring the historical context. Nevertheless, it was shitty of him to do it, no matter what he thought at the time, and no matter how he feels today."

Geimer's account shows that two things were true. Polanski committed a crime. And in response there was an insane media and judicial frenzy which made everything worse. These were the years of Anita Bryant's campaign against homosexuality and a period where the U.S. ruling class was fostering a moral backlash against the sexual revolution of the '60s to shore up its position after its defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal. The Polanski scandal fit right into the atmosphere of the time.

What *Workers Vanguard* Got Wrong

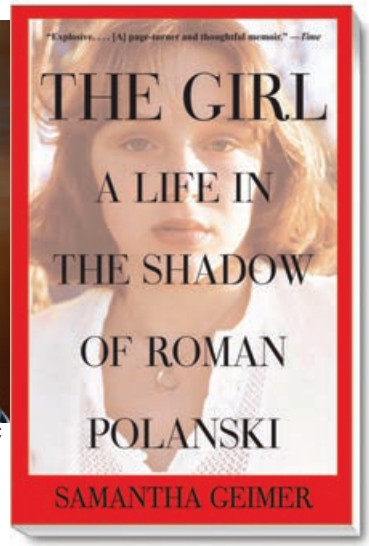
The Polanski article in *WV* sought first and foremost to oppose the conservative social backlash surrounding the

case. However, in doing so, it simply put a minus where everyone else was putting a plus, declaring Polanski innocent and acting in effect as his defense lawyer. One of the passages of the article that has raised the most outcry (including in the party's own ranks at the time) is the one where Geimer's previous sexual experience is cited as proof that the sexual intercourse between her and Polanski was consensual. This was a grotesque argument, regularly used in bourgeois courts to slander rape victims.

The question of whether Geimer wanted to have sex is never raised in the article and her point of view is totally dismissed. The disregard for Geimer went so far as to approvingly quote a statement from Polanski in which he calls her a "little whore." In the name of fighting a puritan witchhunt, the rape of Geimer is denied and she is slandered. This is a truly reprehensible article, which has nothing whatsoever to do with defending communist morality. It will remain a stain on our history.

Kramer/NBC

Samantha Geimer on *Today* show in September 2013 discussing her memoir.



Why Was This Article Defended for So Long?

The *WV* Polanski article was defended for decades by the ICL despite its being constantly criticized, including with facts that challenged *WV*'s account. This insistence had much to do with the internal dynamics of our organization and how it reacted to a changing social context.

The Polanski article provoked a major crisis in the leadership of the SL/U.S. in 1978. The article's critics were smashed and presented as capitulators to the growing socially conservative trends. This fight marked an important turning point in the history of the party, which had grown substantially in an earlier period of militancy but was now facing increasing isolation and stagnation. The party's response to this new context was to reinforce its most sectarian tendencies. Positions like the one taken on Polanski were seen as proof that we were standing against the stream; the result was a more brittle organization increasingly divorced from living social contradictions.

For members who joined the ICL after this period, attracted by its position for black liberation in the U.S. or the fight against counterrevolution in the DDR and Soviet Union, the position on Polanski and on the age of consent (see article page 24) were often difficult pills to swallow. But they were positions which the party had elevated to points of principle and which had to be accepted to be a member. Comrades not familiar with the details of the Polanski case trusted that the party's position was factually correct and that this was a case of consensual sex. For many it was an uncomfortable position that we hoped could be swept under the rug.

Does this mean we are changing our position out of simple opportunism? No. We are correcting our position because it is indefensible and flowed from a wrong method of approaching questions of morality. If this correction has been so long delayed, it is because we refused to simply concede to attacks motivated by right-wing political aims. But this was wrong. The bourgeoisie, echoed by left opportunists, will always use conservative morality against the workers movement. Communists do need to stand up to this, but we should not make their job easier by taking outrageous positions that purposefully shock dominant sentiments or even worse, minimize or deny the violence against the oppressed. Our position on Polanski should stand as a stark warning in this regard. Defending him was inexcusable and only served to soil our own image and hinder the otherwise legitimate struggles we have waged. ■

Age of Consent…

(continued from page 28)

attitudes we encounter; it is the way we deal with them and seek to provide answers.

* * *

The right is on a rampage, and this is enabled by the popular moral basis of their attacks. Those who seek to fight abuse and defend youth must draw two lessons from this experience.

1) Sharing the ruling class's moral arguments, and even deploying them against the right, will only undermine efforts to enfranchise, educate and empower youth. The revolutionary youth movement is extremely marginal; to become a force to be reckoned with, it must construct its ***own*** morality based on understanding that the motor force of youth liberation is the class struggle.
2) Confronting the dominant morality with a counter-crusade will backfire. The rise of conservatism among all sectors of society is understandably frustrating for leftists, including leftist youth. This certainly reflects how far we have left to go. However, confronting social attitudes head-on and in isolation from their social roots will never play out in favor of revolutionaries. Stand unflinching in the face of the conservative morality of the ruling class and its reflection among the masses. Learn the rhythm of history. And prioritize the patient work of nurturing a class polarization, allowing the masses to learn through their experience which morality serves them best. ■

Online Safety Act

First They Came for Benefits... Then They Came for Porn

Yui Mok/PA

BY TOM G.

The following article first appeared in Workers Hammer *No. 256 (Autumn 2025).*

The British Online Safety Act 2023 has now had its most oppressive measures implemented. Any content deemed to be "harmful" or "hateful" now requires age verification. What is this supposedly harmful content? Anything from images of Gaza to forums for young people on trans and sexual health. But the biggest target by far of the genocide-supporting feminists of the Labour Party, the most sinful of all, is porn. And if suppressing young people's sexuality and access to health information isn't bad enough, the law has created an open goal for Farage.

The government claims this bill is about protecting young women from online abuse. It is undeniable that there is a rise in misogyny. In schools, you would not be able to spend a day without hearing numerous anti-woman comments. At home and in the family, violence against women is ever rising. In fact, there is not an area of life where the rise in misogyny isn't reflected—including through social media and porn.

However, the Online Safety Act does nothing for the fight against misogyny—it is a classic example of liberals attacking the symptoms and not the cause. The growth of misogyny isn't a result of social media or porn, but the utterly desperate conditions for the working class and youth today.

The schools are falling apart while kids are treated like prisoners. Youth centres are a distant memory of past generations. Other public services such as leisure centres and libraries are closing by the hour. The screws are increasingly being tightened on young people as society crumbles before their eyes. Limiting access to the internet further fuels resentment and does the opposite of protecting young women.

Human nature is a factor too. According to liberals and conservatives alike, young people are sweet and innocent little things until easy and/or accidental access to porn corrupts them. Either that, or they must be "damaged" by some kind of "abuse" to want to explore their sexuality. But this is nothing more than moral fantasy. The reality is, when kids reach puberty, a whole array of hormones are awakened, and it is natural to want to explore these new feelings and desires. The main purpose of puberty, regardless of what age it begins, is to form sexual capability and needs. No matter how hard liberals try, they cannot stop pubescent teens becoming sexual beings—it simply goes against human nature.

It is also important to understand the social conditions for teenage sex during this period. Anti-sex moralism is at a modern high; sex and relationship education in schools is diabolical and finding a comfortable and private place for teens to do it is almost impossible. Not only does this make the possibility for teens to engage in sex so difficult, but it is why teens are so reliant on porn today. In the absence of more natural ways, ie, with one another, young people have little choice but to explore their sexuality through porn.

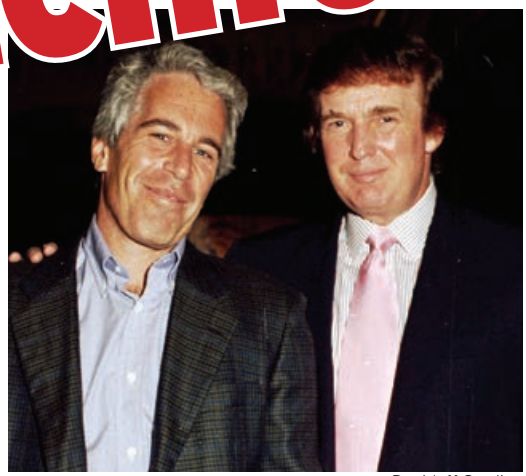
So, alongside everything else, it is no wonder that in response to the liberals blocking porn to youth, many kids are turning to the right since Farage & Co are the most vocal opponents of the Online Safety Act. Obviously, Nigel Farage does not care about kids' safety and frankly shares the same moral opposition to youth sexuality as the liberals; but this becomes secondary because he is seen as at least opposing the establishment and their law.

Farage also hits on real and genuine concerns of working people, namely that "harmful" or "hateful" are vague terms that can be used to censor political opponents of the establishment. The liberals are policing the internet more than ever before. And it's not just the right that is threatened by it; the left too can be further censored. As an example, social media companies who use the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, which equates anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, now pretty much have free rein to silence any anti-Israeli genocide post they want on the basis of "hateful" speech. Of course, Farage is fine with censoring the left and only wants right-wing demagogy to be freely allowed. This is all the more reason why the left must stand against the liberals and oppose the Online Safety Act. If the left stays silent on this issue, it will be another example of why the working class sees the left as establishment stooges. ■

Epstein Files

The Billionaires Deserve the Pitchforks

U.S. Department of Justice



Davidoff Studios

U.S. Department of Justice

Rogues' gallery: Bill Clinton, Jeffrey Epstein, Donald Trump and another parasite formerly known as Prince Andrew.

BY MICHAEL DAVISSON

Sex trafficking of teenage girls. Systematic torture of vulnerable youth. Rumored hunting parties of black people. Dead men tell no tales, but the files left behind by Jeffrey Epstein are a catalog of unspeakable crimes. It's no wonder a galaxy of forces combined to try to keep this extremely damning evidence hidden. Trump's name appears many thousands of times in his closest friend's available files—and much more material remains under wraps. Of course, the president has lots of company: prominent figures in international business and banking, lying politicians from both sides of the aisle, pampered royal relics of a bygone era and even some celebrities are implicated. Slick Willie (Clinton) certainly has a lot more explaining to do. This whole sordid saga has sparked an outpouring of raw anger among workers of all backgrounds. Revolutionaries must try to give that anger a clear and consistent class content and expression.

The Dark Underbelly of the Liberal World Order

The wealthy elites in the U.S. are no strangers to profound sexual depravity, dating back even before the widespread rape of enslaved black women and girls. But the Epstein case is distinctly modern. His rise to riches was fueled by the U.S.-dominated liberal world order in the heyday of globalization. Epstein consolidated his international network at the time when the country's ruling class was spreading its tentacles into every corner of the planet. The social crimes at the heart of this process (e.g., the pillage of other countries) enabled the personal crimes of Epstein and his associates. He amassed his fortune as a power broker and financial fixer for the billionaires, who were reaping vast sums from wild speculation and other parasitic behavior.

Even while these vultures profited tremendously from the misery of others, they pretended like they cared. So, too, did Epstein, who exaggerated his philanthropy to rebuild his public image after his 2008 conviction for soliciting underage sex. When nobody was looking, though, this mask of concern came off and the Epstein gang expressed how the billionaires truly view the daughters and sons of the working masses. Today, the age of liberal hypocrisy that produced Epstein is no more. But we are not better off for it. There are plenty more Epsteins out there and the billionaires are more willing than ever to crash and burn our world in order to keep theirs afloat.

The Epstein files confirm what many workers have long felt. The trove of material is vivid proof that the system is rigged by the rich behind the scenes, and to monstrous ends at that. As the late comedian George Carlin quipped, it's a big club, and you ain't in it. The rules just don't apply to them. The powers that be turn even one-time, low-level sex offenders into social pariahs for life as a means to regiment the population. But they let one of their own intermediaries get away with a slap on the wrist, all so he could keep procuring

them favors. Epstein was able to operate for as long as he did owing to this mutual protection racket. Even today, the big club might have tossed out a few sacrificial lambs (so long, Andrew Mountbatten and Peter Mandelson), but not a single Epstein associate has fallen from grace in the U.S. itself.

Whether social plunder out in the open or sadistic violence behind closed doors, the billionaires commit their barbaric acts with impunity. Workers do not stand a chance in isolation. That's why the U.S. rulers go to such pains to keep them divided against one another. But for all the differences among working people, both real and perceived, their near-universal outrage at the Epstein affair testifies to the fact that they are all put upon by the billionaires. It will be possible to keep this common enemy at bay only if workers practice their own form of mutual protection based on the trade unions and band together in defense of one another.

Conspiracy Theorizing Keeps True Power in Place

At the moment, seething anger is finding less promising outlets. Among these is conspiracy theorizing. The QAnon movement has declared the vindication of its core message that a satanic cabal of moneyed pedophiles controls Western institutions under the wing of the deep state. But such takes on power dynamics hold no water. There are conspiracies in history (see Epstein), but history is not a conspiracy. The shape and development of a society cannot be explained through the narrow lens of the secret plots of a few evil actors. To accomplish that requires zooming out to a broader view of the clash between the competing interests of the great social forces, the classes. From this standpoint, one can understand not only the social processes that nurtured Epstein, but also how to counter them.

In contrast, conspiracy theories rarely provide any clear course of action to change things for the better. And when action is urged, it is a distraction. Working people are kept charging individually into pizza parlor basements (see Pizzagate), when they need to be joining in collective struggle against the billionaires. Sure enough, QAnon's messiah is none other than Trump, who is supposed to "save the children." Back in office, he has done everything but that, from keeping a lid on the Epstein files and denying food stamps to poor kids for weeks to bombing a girls' school in Tehran. Cracks are emerging in MAGA because the president acts in accordance with the interests of the ruling class, not his promises to workers.

Eser/ZUMA

Washington, D.C., November 2025: Protesters outside Capitol during news conference on Epstein files.

Beyond his immediate victims, Epstein probably inflicted the greatest harm on his own people. His offenses are fodder for all the vilest anti-Semitic tropes. Those who blame "Jewish capitalism" for society's ills are shielding those at the very heights of power. Figures like Epstein and liberal billionaire George Soros do not pull the strings in the U.S. The WASPs have always held that honor; to this day, they make up the bulk of capitalists. Some claim that Epstein was a Mossad agent who engaged in illicit activity on behalf of Israel. Whatever the truth on this score, Epstein was able to get away with so much because the U.S. empire accorded him great license. In a similar vein, those who argue that Israel blackmailed Trump into launching "Operation Epstein Fury" against Iran get the relationship between the two countries all wrong. The U.S. is the world power; if Israel lost Washington's backing, the Zionist state would not fare well surrounded by all the hostility it has provoked. Trump went to war because he calculated that doing so would strengthen U.S. domination of the region. That jury is still out.

Left Populism Lets Billionaires Off the Hook

Left populism does not offer any more of a way forward than its right-wing variants. The reason is not hard to figure out. In all cases, the populists look to the "pure people" against the corrupt elite, only their opinions differ on who fits which bill. So, the right populists count Trump among the pure and the Democrats to be corrupt, and it's the opposite for their left counterparts. But Trump and the Democrats are all in the same jacuzzi. Democrat Ro Khanna has played a forward role in trying to get ahead of mass outrage in order to dissipate it. He helped secure the release of the files and bangs on about accountability for the "Epstein class," not to go after the obscenely wealthy, but to save their skin. As Khanna said: "I don't want pitchforks even against people who are billionaires." But absent the coordinated wielding of pitchforks in working-class hands, there will be no real justice for the survivors and no strong deterrent for the next Epstein.

Nonetheless, some on the Marxist left echo Khanna and his talk of the "Epstein class." Let's be clear: all the elite in the U.S. are corrupt. If they are not fought tooth and nail across the board, they will drag everyone else down with them. To further this fight, working people should continue to clamor for the immediate, full release of the unredacted files. This act of exposure can have a real galvanizing effect, as the tumult surrounding the Epstein files demonstrates. It is one thing to assume the worst, it is quite another to see it play out in real time.

The Epstein affair also points to the potential impact of the "open the police archives" campaign, which some leftists have dismissed as inconsequential. Such an attitude betrays an indifference to the black and workers struggles alike. The cops are known to work together to rape, torture and kill black and brown people and to victimize workers who take on the bosses, but they throw up a "blue wall of silence" to cover up the details. Subjecting the cops' heinous crimes to the light of day is the kind of thing that could put the billionaires and their deep-state protectors in a real tight spot. ■

The Left Must Win MAGA Workers

Stapleton/Reuters

October 2024: Striking longshoremen at Port Elizabeth, NJ.

BY OLIVE SHEWELL

Many leftists are faced with co-workers who look to "America First" and "Make America Great Again" (MAGA), and have to deal with their appeal in the working class. The left usually offers three alternate ways to deal with conservative workers: shunning them as hopeless bigots, preaching "woke" liberal ideas to them or embracing color-blind "bread and butter" issues while conciliating their prejudices. These are all dead-end strategies.

Pro-Trump workers chose a reactionary answer to a legitimate desire to improve their economic conditions. They think they can achieve this in a partnership with their class enemy, the capitalist class, with Trump at the head of it. To many white as well as Latino and black Trump supporters, "America First" means investing in the U.S. so their kids can have good jobs and afford a decent life. To the ruling class, "America First" means world domination on the backs of both U.S. workers and the world working class. This will lead to more wars, stagnant wages, unemployment, loss of democratic rights and the slashing of Medicaid now and Medicare and Social Security tomorrow. War and plunder overseas require economic austerity at home.

Instead of "America First," it is necessary to put the ***workers first*** over their exploiters. This can only be done by uniting the multiracial working class to defeat the capitalists. For this reason, we must not surrender conservative workers to the forces of MAGA reaction without a fight. These workers cannot improve their own conditions if they keep going down the anti-immigrant, anti-woman, white-supremacist road.

How can leftists begin speaking to pro-Trump workers? Here are some pointers.

Do not blame MAGA voters for Trump's crimes. Pro-Democrat workers often say, "It's their fault, they voted for Trump. They got the government they asked for." Not true. All U.S. workers are allowed to do is choose every four years who will oppress and crush them. Trump, just like the Democrats, serves the interests of the American capitalist class—***not*** the workers who voted for him.

Minorities, women and leftist workers have a justified hatred for the Trump administration. However, blaming their conservative co-workers for Trump's crimes only keeps workers divided, thereby preserving the profits and power of the ruling class.

Do not call all Trump supporters fascists. Fascists are the KKK, neo-Nazis, Proud Boys. They are organized extralegal race-terrorists whose aim is to militarily crush the workers movement. Many fascists choose to join the ranks of the police and especially ICE, as Trump's regime consciously recruits ICE agents with fascist dog whistles.

A fascist is ***not*** the same as a worker with race prejudice. Fascists and racist vigilantes must be defeated on the streets by the workers. Do not debate these terrorists. Do not debate cops. Do not debate hardened racists.

How to fight against race prejudice? Prejudice and working-class unity do not mix. A worker must ultimately choose one and let go of the other. The vast majority of workers hold both feelings of working-class solidarity and an array of prejudices. The aim is for class solidarity to overcome all the prejudices the ruling class pushes in order to divide and conquer their wage slaves.

There needs to be a sorting out of Trump supporters. Leftists need to have an appetite to give revolutionary leadership to a segment of these co-workers. If you refuse to speak to any worker who has race prejudice (or, to give another example, any male co-worker who holds backward prejudices against women), you will find yourself not speaking to many co-workers on the job.

How do you know whether someone is a hardened bigot—e.g., someone who wears the Confederate flag and throws minority co-workers under the bus every chance they get—or a worker with race prejudice who may be won over to the fight for black equality and workers revolution? Observe their actions. Determine whether they have a pro-union instinct or any hatred of injustice. Use that positive quality like a chisel to chip away little by little at the rock of their prejudice. White workers with racist prejudices have been known to vigorously defend black people on the job simply because they despise the bosses more than they despise their co-workers. They understand that the union really has to defend ***everybody***. You need to use a worker's progressive instincts as a lever to flip them to our side.

You should be known for opposing racism and discrimination. At the same time, you don't want to be perceived as an indignant preacher around whom workers have to walk on eggshells. Pick your shots.

You will be trusted to the degree that you can handle backward prejudices in a firm, thoughtful way. These will be defeated and overcome through social struggle. Remind co-workers of the common enemy of white and black workers. Prove how race prejudice and competition for scraps from the master's table only help the capitalists steal from the working class. And always have your co-workers' backs against the bosses.

Workers prefer less talking, more action. Seek out concrete actions to pull Trump supporters in the direction of working-class interests. Conservative workers may falsely believe that mass deportations will bring more jobs, but they don't like the idea of ICE kidnapping someone they know. Such workers may be willing to join a defense campaign for an immigrant co-worker detained by ICE. Similarly, workers who generally believe racist stereotypes might stand up for a black co-worker they know who is discriminated against by the bosses.

Seek out opportunities to mobilize co-workers for this type of small defensive action, which will help to raise the consciousness of conservative workers. At the same time, the way minority workers will believe what you say about MAGA workers' potential for common struggle with them is to ***see it in action***.

Begin with something you both agree on, then flip the script. Begin conversations with pro-Trump workers by distinguishing yourself from the liberals. Only then can you effectively explain your opposition to Trump. For example, you could begin a conversation on DEI by explaining how you hated that the liberal establishment guilt-tripped workers and claimed that all white male workers were the enemy of women and black people.

Then flip the script with a new idea that might not be accepted right away. Demonstrate how Trump's racist anti-DEI purge is a war on all labor, including white workers. The ruling class began by targeting black federal workers, whom the racists falsely claimed "Didn't Earn It." This was the opening shot in the battle to purge 300,000 white and black federal employees and eliminate collective bargaining. This paves the way for abolishing collective bargaining in other sectors as well. Ohio followed this model, passing a law that prohibits both DEI and all faculty strikes at public colleges.

Conservative workers need to understand that in some ways the class struggle is like a street fight. Since the capitalists always aim the first punch at the most marginalized people—blacks, immigrants, women and trans people—workers must answer it with a strong, united punch against the class enemy. Otherwise, they will be the next victims. That is why ***all*** workers must fight against discrimination.

Internationalism begins with opposing one's "own" ruling class. Most Americans will oppose their own rulers long before they solidarize with the peoples of the world. The best way to defend the Palestinians and other oppressed nations is to mobilize U.S. workers to defeat their own ruling class! Unsolicited lectures about caring for people overseas often increase workers' resentment that no one seems to care about how they themselves are struggling to survive.

For now, U.S. workers are mostly patriotic and support their own rulers. Their rotten, pro-capitalist union leaders persuade them to scrap their own strikes anytime the government invokes "national security." Indeed, strikes ***do*** threaten the power and security of the national capitalists. Empower workers to disregard this emotional blackmail and strike for what they need.

If workers ask your opinions on the world, try to explain how they themselves are harmed by U.S. imperialist attacks abroad. These make American workers less safe, not least because the capitalist class brings the war home: ICE and the National Guard occupy U.S. cities; immigrants and U.S. citizens have been murdered by immigration agents and the

COFTU

Los Angeles, September 2025: United-front protest initiated by the Committee for One Fighting Transit Union, outside the Metro headquarters demanding immediate reinstatement of two bus drivers disciplined for speaking out in defense of immigrant riders.

police; now Trump's regime is threatening workers' right to bear arms. Remind workers how soldiers who fight overseas for America's billionaires return home to unemployment, PTSD and cuts to VA health programs. Fan the flames of class anger against the U.S. rulers by pointing to workers' own interests.

MAGA workers don't have to morally regenerate in order to defend oppressed workers. "Immigrants are welcome here" and other liberal cries of humanitarianism often push workers deeper into the arms of Trump. Conservative workers don't need to feel charitable in order to defend immigrants. They need to understand the game the enemy is playing with them and respond accordingly. The U.S. imperialists bomb and plunder other countries, rendering them unlivable. Then they open and close the U.S. border like a faucet, depending on their labor needs. They try to use immigrant workers—who are deprived of all rights and forced to work for less—as a weapon against U.S. labor.

American workers have no choice whether immigrants come in, and they don't even have to like them. But they do have a choice about what to do now that they're here. Organizing immigrant electricians, construction workers, truck drivers, etc. into the unions is the only alternative to disastrous wage competition.

Will workers continue to unite with Trump and their own exploiters and support ICE occupations of their cities, the shredding of their own right to walk around without masked gunmen demanding to see their IDs, the constant lowering of their own wages through competition with the remaining immigrants, and the encirclement of the remaining islands of unionism by a sea of non-union labor?

Or will American workers unionize immigrants and demand they get the same democratic rights so they can strike without fear of deportation? Will they fight for more jobs for all through a shorter workweek at no loss in pay, instead of today's rivalry over the shrinking piece of the pie?

Labor is only as strong as its weakest link. Leftists must lead white workers in defense of the most marginalized groups in order to strengthen labor's fighting capacity.

Take a break, leave the door open. Workers may discontinue a discussion that is pushing them out of their comfort zone. The important thing is to try to end discussions in a way that doesn't sever the relationship entirely. Sometimes a relationship does need to be severed, but that is a very rare case.

Workers have a long memory. Don't be surprised if you get nowhere in a discussion and then a year later, after something in the world has changed, they say, "Remember what you said to me back then? You were right." ■

Youth Oppression…

(continued from page 9)

Rights of the Child. This history has shaped liberal understandings of what it means to free children from oppression, such as "highlighting children's voices" and respecting their "agency." These are empty moral platitudes that change nothing. Meanwhile, the UN attempts to reconcile children having those things with a bloodthirsty U.S. imperialism (and its various junior partners) that ravages even its "own" children with outrageous levels of poverty, often prison-like segregated schools of lower and lower quality and much more. This is a reality in which many people's children can scarcely hope to eat or stay housed, let alone have the ability to speak their political mind or do what they want with their time when even their parents often cannot do that.

Why We Fight

Why must we fight for children's and youth liberation? Because childhood is central to the process by which this hated, oppressive capitalist system reproduces itself and perpetuates all of our collective oppression. Capitalism could not continue to produce the docile workers it needs to function without the deprivation many young children face, the division between adults and children that rends families apart, and the brutal discipline of children and youth in an unnaturally prolonged period of dependence. Child and youth oppression helps to create divisions between adults and children/youth in the working class even though their objective interests are the same. We must fight to overcome these divisions by taking up the cause of children's and youth liberation in the class-struggle battles to come, defending children and youth against the rapacious capitalist state and against burdensome capitalist discipline.

What's more, why stop at disrupting the capitalist process of oppressive reproduction? We must also take charge of fulfilling children's needs and of social reproduction, directing these processes so they serve our interests as a class. While it is a long-held truism that children are the future, there is a deeper truth that underlies this trite saying. That truth is that the ***fate*** of ***our*** children and youth is our collective future, which we can either roll over and let the ruling class keep charge of or fight to take charge of ourselves. Older children and youth have an interest in joining this fight, since their integration into the struggle will liberate them from ignorance and artificially prolonged dependence on adults. The construction of a new society for workers can begin with the process of growing up, if we would only seize control of it. ■

Nickolai Kochergin

1920 Soviet poster reads "International Communist youth organizations call all oppressed young people of all countries to join their ranks!"

The Left Must Win MAGA Women Too

Weaver/Pacific Press

Sunbury, Pennsylvania, November 2020: Women workers at Trump campaign rally.

BY OLIVE SHEWELL

Pro-Trump women are an enigma to many leftists and feminists, and one they are not eager to approach. How is it that so many working-class and impoverished women support a racist, anti-woman tyrant and Jeffrey Epstein's good friend? Why do they defend Trump's ICE agents when they systematically brutalize immigrant mothers and shot a white Minneapolis mother in the face because she protested the raids? Why do they support the sinister White House cabal, which wants women to be submissive to their husbands and seeks to turn this country into a Christian evangelical re-enactment of *The Handmaid's Tale*?

Some may ask, why are we communists fighting to convince such women to oppose Trump? "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) women are a class-divided group. It includes not just the despicable Karoline Leavitt and wealthy bourgeois wives. MAGA women are also workers, wives of workers, small shop owners, teachers, nurses and many others just struggling to survive. Many of them are also pro-union, gun-toting, strong-willed mothers who want some abortion rights and constitutional rights at the same time as they want to give their children a better life. The revolution needs these women on ***our*** side.

In 1921, revolutionary leader Clara Zetkin said in a speech to the Third Congress of the Communist International:

> "Women, who are now often obstacles to revolutionary struggle, must become its driving force. For let us not be deceived, comrades: either the revolution will win the women or the counterrevolution will do it!... If you Communists do not see to it that the broadest masses of women are present in the revolutionary camp, the bourgeois parties will make sure they are in the camp of the counterrevolution."
>
> —"Report on Communist Women's Movement," published in John Riddell, ed., *To the Masses* (2015)

Conservative working women are reacting to the decomposition of American life as they once knew it. Grandpa and dad worked at Ford. A single household income of 50 hours a week was enough to buy a home, a car and maybe a fishing boat to putz around in. Even if you were poor, you felt you had the possibility to work your way out of it. Kids could roam around freely outside and after they grew up, they could expect to get a job as good or better than their struggling parents had. Maybe mom wasn't happy and dad was always exhausted. But they always had food and a roof over their heads. The men had jobs.

They view liberals as the ones who attacked that old way of life. They are not entirely wrong. Conservative women are seeking the safety and financial security that previous generations had. That's why they embraced the slogan "Make America Great Again" in 2016 and rejected Hillary Clinton's "America Is Already Great" refrain. No amount of pandering by Democrats today will erase the imprint her characterization of Trump supporters as "deplorables" left, for it captured the distilled class hatred of the liberal elite for their wage slaves.

MAGA women are so sick of the deindustrialized liberal world order that they desire a president who will tear it to shreds, falsely believing Trump will bring good jobs and prosperity like their grandparents had after WWII. Trump's vicious misogyny and his headlong dive toward another economic recession are not enough for these women to oppose him. Conservative women are willing to suffer a lot if Trump can do one thing: ***Give American workers and their kids a better life.***

Trump will fail them miserably. Trump doubles down on the culture wars and religious bigotry while he breaks each promise he made—there is another war in the Middle East, fewer jobs, higher gas prices and a worse future for their children. But working-class MAGA women will not be broken from Trump through insulting their beliefs or scorning them for holding on to religion when they feel powerless. Religion is the only coat they have in this storm; it is often their only source of strength and community-building.

They need to be shown in the course of concrete events that the MAGA cabal is not the answer to their needs. It will take successful working-class upheavals in order for most women (and male workers) to shed religion and their other prejudices like a worn-out coat. But, in the meantime, if socialists fail to sever their ties to Democratic Party liberalism and to give MAGA women real answers to their concerns, it will only drive them deeper into the arms of misogynist, white nationalist reactionaries. ***Organizing women and men workers to change their conditions in this life is key.*** ■

WORKERS VANGUARD
Where is the U.S. Going?
workersvanguard.org/1183/us-tasks

Communism and Trans Liberation

BY G. PERRAULT

We print below a presentation at a debate with Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) leader Mike Macnair on 12 October 2025.

I would like to start by thanking the CPGB for organizing this discussion. The trans question is of central importance to the left today, first because it is being used by the right as a spearhead for reaction; second, because it is a source of great controversy and disunity on the left; third and most importantly, because trans people represent one of the most oppressed groups in society whose cause must be championed by communists.

In my report today, I will try to outline the Spartacist League's basic approach to the question of trans liberation. The discussion should be quite interesting because there are many points on which we and the CPGB converge. I hope this can allow us to really get to the heart of the matter.

For us, the way we view our tasks regarding the trans question is consistent with how we view the tasks of communists in general. Marxism is a guide to action; we must use its method and materialist grounding to ***guide the struggle of the oppressed***.

As for the CPGB, we think the strengths and weaknesses of its approach to the trans question reflect those of its approach in general. We think the CPGB is in rare company in the British left in that it upholds orthodox Marxist conceptions on many questions and will argue for them polemically within the left. However, we believe it does so from an overly abstract standpoint which doesn't help guide the struggles at hand. I will show this concretely with regard to the trans question at the end of my presentation. First, I want to explain our basic approach to the question.

Source of the Backlash

The first step in making a constructive intervention into the trans movement is to understand the political situation it currently faces. It is not difficult to observe that the trans movement finds itself on the back foot and isolated. Where Marxists have a unique contribution to make is in providing a historical materialist explanation for the current backlash. This is not just a theoretical exercise; it is essential if we want to root our intervention in concrete material reality.

To understand the debates over the trans question, it is necessary to take a broader view and place them within the general trends of historical development. Somewhat counterintuitively, we need to start with the position of the U.S. in the world to understand the challenges facing the trans movement.

Women & Revolution graphic

Workers Hammer

The task of communists is not only to dream about the future, but to guide today's struggles to get there.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S., starting from a position of uncontested hegemonic power, has seen its relative position and that of its imperialist allies gradually decline. As with all empires, its ideological and political superstructure evolved in tandem with these economic and geopolitical changes. The ideology embodying the interests of the U.S. order started with liberal triumphalism in the ’90s—basically that the American model was universally applicable and preordained to triumph. Then in the 2010s, as liberalism started to be challenged, it became increasingly brittle and hysterical, aggressively confronting any opposition (think of the crazy Russia-gate campaign). And now we have the openly anti-liberal Trump regime. The key point to understand is that these ideological shifts reflect changes in the material position of U.S. imperialism.

Looking at it in this context, we can see that an important reason the trans question is so explosive and holds so much weight in public debate is that it stands right at the frontier of two broad historical trends. It started to become a question in the political mainstream right as the liberals were increasingly running out of road. Neoliberal leaders started pushing for trans rights as a way to appear socially progressive at little cost. Comrade Macnair has shown quite well how the Theresa May government tried and failed to do this.

It is certainly a good thing that being trans became, for a time, more socially acceptable. But the fact that this happened right as the liberal world order was plunging into an existential crisis has meant that support for trans rights has been very brittle. It didn’t take much for supposed champions of the trans cause to turn around and embrace totally reactionary anti-trans positions. Just look at the Labour Party.

The other consequence of the trans question breaking out on the political scene when it did is that much of the pro-trans discourse has been tainted by the worst traits of liberalism in crisis: extreme moralizing, brittleness and refusal to engage in debate. For a group that represents a tiny minority of the population, such methods are disastrous and can only further its social isolation.

For Marxists, a central task is to forge a link between the trans movement and the workers movement. Here, too, it is essential to understand the broader context. Throughout the Western world, the working class has moved sharply against the liberal status quo, sick and tired of being told to accept worsening living conditions in the name of grand, abstract ideals. The problem, however, is that this backlash against the status quo is taking on a conservative, anti-liberal expression that directly targets minority rights, including those of trans people.

From all of this, we draw a rather simple conclusion. The trans movement’s association with liberalism has been an albatross around its neck. The only way it can form an alliance with the working class is by breaking with liberalism. This doesn’t mean compromising on the fight for trans rights but simply placing it within a class perspective. I will elaborate more on this a little later.

Marxist Analysis of Gender

First, I want to briefly lay out how we as Marxists understand the trans question. As you know, debates on gender and sex tend to be very heated. For us, it is important to place the theoretical debates in the context of what each side seeks to achieve.

At bottom, the anti-trans side seeks to make it more difficult to be socially accepted as trans. To justify this, they present reality as fixed and unchanging. This is why they harp on biological essentialism so much. The pro-trans side of the debate, for its part, wants to make being trans more socially acceptable. Unfortunately, they usually do this by using relativism and idealism, whereby categories are entirely arbitrary and depend solely on individual will. We see the most absurd version of this when a cis (non-trans) person claims they could change their gender by simply proclaiming themselves another gender.

As Marxists, we are of course on the pro-trans side of the debate. But as in all other struggles, we root it in a dialectical materialist analysis, in which reality is not fixed but contradictory and in constant change. If we aim to change not just individuals but society itself, this approach is essential.

How does this translate concretely into understanding gender and answering the notorious question: what is a woman? We start by recognizing that there is indeed a qualitative biological difference between male and female humans. Without this dichotomy, human reproduction would be impossible. This is not to deny that there is a spectrum, where a small number of individuals are not easy to place in these distinct categories. But these are variations within a clear bipolar spectrum.

While a lot of the heat comes from debates over biology, this is not really the heart of the matter. Chromosomes and the ability to reproduce are not actually decisive in determining social relations between the sexes. The real contention is about gender, in other words, the social significance of being a man or a woman.

The reason why reactionaries always refer to biology is that they think it easily proves their argument that there are fixed, impermeable categories separating the genders. Against this, the trans movement is correct to argue that gender is first and foremost social. But just because something is social doesn’t mean it is not real or can be changed

Kerrison/Alamy

London, July 2022: Zack Polanski (center) takes part in Trans+ Pride march.

Masterton/Alamy

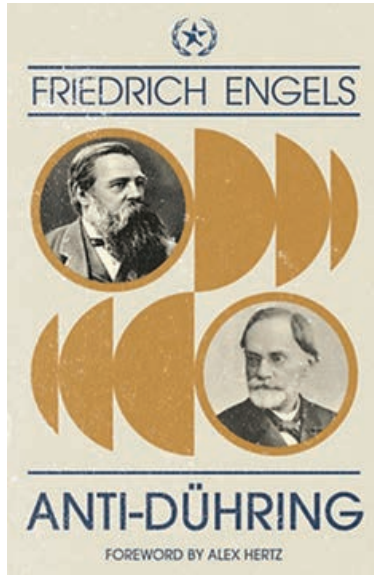
Dundee, Scotland, February: Zarah Sultana, co-founder of Your Party, addresses the conference.

on a whim. In fact, trans people know better than anyone how difficult it is to transition from one gender to another. It is not a purely individual process but a social one in which, for most, it is a constant struggle to be accepted.

The most important mistake made by the mainstream trans movement is to downplay the material roots of gender divisions. The fact is that the sexual division of society runs extremely deep and is rooted in the institution of the monogamous patriarchal family. This institution predates even capitalism itself and cannot simply be wished away. Denying this is, in fact, the central thesis of idealist academics like Judith Butler, a key figure in the modern trans movement.

The truth is, defense of the gendered status quo is not just a product of backward ideas floating around in people's heads. These are rooted in the way society is organized. Even in a country like Britain where there is a National Health Service, the provision of social care largely relies on the family. The same is true for the raising of children. No theoretical argument can make this material dependence disappear. This is the source of conservative ideas on gender.

In many ways, views regarding the family can be compared to those on religion. As Marxists, we know that religious ideas are false. But unlike crusading atheists who seek to purge this backwardness by mocking religious ideas, we understand that they are rooted in a social need; that religion is the opium of the people. As such, while arguing against religious illusions, we fundamentally seek to remove the social need for such ideas. Our approach to gender must be the same. We cannot abolish gender relations; they must wither away.



This does not mean that trans people need to wait until after the revolution. Rather, it means that the fight for trans rights in the here and now must consider the material constraints in which it takes place. This means understanding that in the same way that the majority of the working class will not be won to atheism before the revolution, it will not be won over to the idea of ending all gender divisions. But ***through its struggles***, the working class can and must be won to the understanding that the organized church is its enemy and that fighting for trans rights is a necessity. In both cases, the masses do not need to start with the correct abstract conceptions; ideas change as a result of struggle and transformations in material conditions.

The Task of Communists

Now that I have given a basic overview of how we approach the trans question, I want to deal with some concrete political questions facing the movement. As I already said, for us, guiding struggle is the whole point of Marxism, and it is here that we see our most important differences with the CPGB.

Your Party

Let me start with our respective interventions in Your Party. You know as much as we do that the trans question is already one of the most polarizing questions in this party. In fact, this question already threatens to rip it apart. For us, it is essential to weigh in on these disputes and put forward a position that can unite the working class and the trans movement.

As you know, the controversy was kicked off when Adnan Hussain, one of the independent Muslim MPs, said he defended women-only spaces. This sparked a strong reaction among pro-trans activists. While it was certainly necessary to argue against Hussain's views, it was necessary to do so in a way that wouldn't push away left-leaning Muslim activists…which of course is exactly what Zarah Sultana did in stating there was no place for people with socially conservative views in Your Party.

The problem here is once again focusing on what people have as ideas in their heads rather than on how to unite them in a common struggle. In our intervention on the question, we argued that an alliance between Muslim and trans people can be built if we insist on the need to fight for each other's rights (which includes, of course, the right of trans people to access public spaces corresponding to their chosen gender). Such an alliance does not need to be premised on accepting gender theory, or Islam for that matter.

To build such an alliance, it is necessary to push back against both sides: the conservative prejudices of certain Muslims and the moralism of certain trans activists. In both cases, the key argument to make is that neither group can afford to be isolated. They need to forge alliances, and this can only be done by uniting in a common struggle, where it is accepted that there are different views on social questions but where each side will respect and defend the other's democratic rights.

I bring this question up because it very concretely brings to life all our theoretical views on the trans question. The point of our theory has to be to overcome such immediate political problems. I'm curious to hear what comrades of the CPGB thought of our intervention on this question. I found some of the points in Jack Conrad's article "Neither king nor empress" similar to our views but somewhat general about the basis for unity in action.

So, what is our difference here? I think it is really how we view our respective roles regarding Your Party. For us, the main problem in Your Party is that it can't answer any of the important political questions of the day, centrally, the divide between the left and the working class. At bottom, we think that Marxists are the only ones who can provide real answers to this problem.

Eleventh Hour Photography

London, April 2025: Pro-trans demonstration after the Supreme Court's trans-exclusionary ruling over legal definition of a woman.

In this sense, we think it is of the utmost importance that communists help overcome the tensions on the trans question in a progressive way. It is exactly the kind of question that divides the left and is used as a wedge to drive workers to the right. This is why we have made the trans question one of the spearheads of our intervention in Your Party.

For its part, the CPGB does not seem to recognize that there is a great divide between the working class and the left. And to the extent it recognizes the tensions on the trans question, it does not view overcoming them as central to its intervention in Your Party. While it has written pages and pages on the democratic functioning and intrigues at the top of Your Party, it has only made passing comments on the trans question.

But here is the question: what is the point of theoretical Marxist discussions on the trans question if we do not seek to use Marxism to advance the movement when this is concretely posed and urgently needed? This is the whole point, really.

The Cass Review

The next example I want to go to is the Cass review. Its publication in 2024 marked a major shift in public opinion in Britain. It was used to ban the provision of hormone blockers to teenagers and as a justification for the Labour Party to ditch any association with the trans cause. We think it was essential to oppose this ban as well as the hysteria around it (see "Let Trans Kids Decide!" *Workers Hammer* No. 252, Spring 2024).

The problem with most of the left's response to the review was that it did not oppose its moralistic premise that youth should not be given the choice to decide their gender. In this regard, I think comrade Macnair makes an important mistake in his exchange with comrade Brunhilda (see "Solidarity, not sectionalism," *Weekly Worker* No. 1504, 29 August 2024), where he compares access to hormones and puberty blockers to the overprescription of antibiotics. While the latter concerns a medical condition, the former is a question of how an individual wishes to be recognized socially—being trans is not a medical condition.

Moreover, hormone blockers are generally safe and simply delay the onset of puberty. As communists, we don't think it is for parents or the state to decide if a kid can be trans or not. As such, we are against restrictions on puberty blockers, and we hope the CPGB reviews its approach to this question.

Minimum Maximum

I will finish by addressing what I think is the biggest issue with the CPGB's approach: its minimum-maximum program. The problem is not having a minimum and a maximum program per se. The problem arises when this program is viewed as a timeless set of positions that does not address how questions are posed concretely.

Let me give just one example. In the past four years, there have been undeniable qualitative changes in the world situation. Yet the CPGB's draft program has not significantly changed as a result. If we look at the trans question, the movement is in a very different place today than it was five years ago. A program on the trans question—in other words, "what we need to fight for"—must change to account for the new challenges.

We can debate which five or ten points a workers government could enact to improve the condition of trans people, but that doesn't help in any way to guide people in their struggles today.

For us, the main problem facing the trans movement right now is its social isolation and its separation from the working class. In fact, this is basically the same problem the left has in general. We view our main task as trying to overcome this state of affairs. If we work on the theoretical side of the question, it is to accomplish this objective.

As for the maximum program—what a communist or socialist society will do—it can be interesting and thought-provoking to think and write about, but again, this does not help us get any closer to socialism, or even to a workers government. As Lenin famously said, paraphrasing Engels, "Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action" ("Letters on Tactics," April 1917).

To conclude, I look forward to comrades' comments and criticisms. And I hope that, as two socialist organizations actually willing to engage with other groups, our discussion today can be clarifying and lead to constructive debates in the future. ■

Germany

Why the Left Party Is Betraying the LGBTQ+ Movement

BY NADJA DOSTAL

The LGBTQ+ movement in Germany—especially trans people—is increasingly being isolated and attacked from all sides. The Self-Determination Act, which was passed only in November 2024 and allows individuals to change their gender and first name by self-declaration to a civil registry office, is now under attack by the Christian Democratic (CDU)/Social Democratic Party (SPD) coalition government. Meanwhile, the "Queer Life" national action plan, which aimed to strengthen the rights of LGBTQ+ people and combat discrimination, has been quietly scrapped. Nearly half the CSD (Gay Pride) parades were attacked by right-wing mobs last year and LGBTQ+ people are not safe from violence on the streets. It is clear to everyone that a future government of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) will ***completely*** roll back the limited gains LGBTQ+ people have achieved.

To defend itself, the LGBTQ+ movement looks primarily to the Left Party, which is seen as the force capable of halting the shift in society toward the right and the AfD. This is why the Left Party more than doubled its membership last year, reaching over 110,000. The problem, however, is that the Left Party conflates the necessary defense of LGBTQ+ people with the defense of the liberal political order. It continues to spread the illusion that liberalism can be preserved and that this is in the interest of the LGBTQ+ movement. In so doing, the Left Party clings to a suicidal policy that turns trans people into scapegoats for the current crisis and strengthens the AfD. The Left Party's support for the "firewall" strategy—a call for German mainstream parties to band together against the far right—is a fatal expression of its adaptation to the declining order. This must end.

Berlin, May 2025: Left Party leaders congratulate Merz as new chancellor. June 2025: Green and Left MPs in rainbow colors during debate on anti-LGBTQ+ hate crime.

Butzmann/dpa; Kern/DDP

The Left Party needs a radical change of course, which the LGBTQ+ movement must fight for ***now***.

How the LGBTQ+ Movement Became Chained to Capitalist Interests

Over the past 30 years, there have been gradual, limited reforms for LGBTQ+ people. Why was the ruling class willing to make these concessions? The decisive factor was its ideological shift following the counterrevolutions in the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc and East Germany. The German bourgeoisie no longer needed anti-communism and now sought to portray Germany as the world's best democracy, one that had learned from the Holocaust and World War II. This had some positive effects for the LGBTQ+ movement: In 1994, Section 175 was repealed. Dating back to the 19th century, this provision prohibited sex between men and was also used later to persecute leftists, both under the Nazis and after 1945. In 2001, same-sex partnerships were legally recognized, and in 2017, same-sex couples were officially granted the right to marry. The reactionary provisions of the Transsexuals Act, which had been in force since 1981 and required numerous humiliating proofs and medical evaluations to change one's gender and name, were progressively relaxed and then replaced by the Self-Determination Act.

The reformed, democratic image that those in power projected served the purpose of advancing globalization. United with the U.S. and following in its wake (protected by

the U.S. military stationed around the world), German capital conquered new markets, for example in Eastern Europe. These economic offensives abroad went hand in hand with predatory practices at home. Workers' gains came under massive attack. At the same time, nearly every town hall was decked out in rainbow flags. The LGBTQ+ movement was made the poster child for liberal values that the EU would enforce. Anyone who criticized the imperialist oppression of weaker countries like Hungary, or the intensified exploitation of the working class through outsourcing and contract labor, was branded as racist, transphobic or hostile to queer people, particularly by social democrats of all stripes. This liberal propaganda helped pave the way for the AfD to be founded and begin growing rapidly.

Now that capitalists worldwide are abandoning their liberal course and quickly severing their ties with the LGBTQ+ movement, the catastrophic consequences are becoming clear. The LGBTQ+ movement is isolated, under attack, and trans people in particular are being made scapegoats for capitalist misery. This helps the ruling class push through its reactionary Trump-style shift and build up the AfD.

The "Firewall" Endangers LGBTQ+ People

As a measure against the violent attacks on Pride parades and LGBTQ+ people, the Left Party submitted a motion to the Bundestag (German parliament) last fall, reminding Chancellor Merz of his noble promises to do everything possible to ensure a safe life for LGBTQ+ people in Germany. Meanwhile, Maik Brückner, the Left Party's spokesperson on queer politics and member of the Bundestag, seeks to save the "Queer Life" action plan by begging the relevant CDU minister to follow the course of the "Progress Coalition" of the SPD, Free Democrats and Greens that governed from 2021 to 2025. This shows how the Left Party, full of suicidal illusions, is counting on the government to defend LGBTQ+ people—the very same force that seeks to and will enforce attacks on LGBTQ+ facilities, healthcare and legal equality.

Behind this lies the Left Party leaders' program of defending the liberal order. They hark back to the "good old days" when Angela Merkel shifted the CDU to the left. However, the conditions under which reforms for the LGBTQ+ movement were possible are irretrievably gone. Under pressure from U.S. imperialism, which needs Trump to maintain its dominance over the world, the German capitalists are destroying their own economy (especially through sanctions against Russia) and pushing through massive austerity measures to pay for militarization. Germany, an economically and militarily weaker junior partner, cannot end the alliance with the U.S.

The idea that the government could go back to standing up for the LGBTQ+ movement is closely linked to the disastrous "firewall" policy: the Left Party claims that unity with all other political parties against the right is necessary to stop the AfD. Around the time of the Bundestag elections in winter 2025, hundreds of thousands took to the streets for democracy with light chains and rainbow flags to show that any party was worth voting for—except, of course, the AfD. However, these demonstrations did not stop the AfD because they promoted the very parties—such as the SPD, the Left Party, the Greens and the CDU—that are primarily responsible for the country's plight. Workers in particular feel rightly betrayed by their traditional parties, the SPD and Left Party, since these parties have supported and waged attacks on their living and working conditions for decades. Some 38% of workers voted for the AfD in the federal elections (in contrast, the Left Party received only 8% of working-class votes).

Currently the Left Party is going along with almost every dirty trick the government pulls (pension reform, the appointment of judges, arms deliveries to Ukraine…) and justifies this by saying that anything is better than the AfD getting in. Many LGBTQ+ people initially agree with this argument out of legitimate concern about a potential AfD government. But the obvious problem is that the Left Party's political unity with the government is doing nothing to stop the AfD. Quite the contrary. The AfD can thus continue to present itself as the sole opposition to the hated status quo and to the government, gaining a huge number of new supporters, especially among workers. The "firewall" policy against the right is thus paving the way for an AfD government.

Within the left, the LGBTQ+ movement must fight for a new course that puts an end to the "firewall" policy, shatters illusions in the old liberal order and embarks on a revolutionary path.

We Can Only Defend Ourselves in Alliance with the Labor Movement

What is actually needed is a broad defensive struggle ***against*** the government and the status quo. Not only has the LGBTQ+ movement been singled out as a target, but so have other minorities, women and the working class. The LGBTQ+ movement alone does not have the power to stand up to the reactionary capitalist offensive and therefore needs the labor movement at its side. The working class is the only force with the power to hit the capitalists where it hurts—their profits—especially through effective strikes which can compel them to back down.

Hammerschmidt/picture alliance

Cottbus, 2025: Young Nationalist fascists (Junge Nationalisten) march in East German city against CSD (Gay Pride). Banner reads "No to CSD—Our City Remains Hetero."

Lohnes/Getty

Frankfurt am Main, 2025: Striking airport workers from ver.di union. Banner reads: "More Money, More Time—My Decision!"

But how can the LGBTQ+ movement reach workers, including those who already support the AfD? The left's approach so far won't work. It doesn't help to try to impose woke ideas on workers or even start berating them if they think differently or don't use gender-neutral language. Workers ***don't*** have to become enlightened liberals to recognize the need to defend the LGBTQ+ movement. It is in workers' own class interests to protect the material conditions and rights of LGBTQ+ people. This is what must be emphasized to win over workers. If the capitalists get away with attacks against oppressed minorities like trans people, then they will have a much easier time further driving down the working and living conditions of everyone. The labor and LGBTQ+ movements will either be defeated separately or go forward together.

For example, defending the Self-Determination Act is important for the labor movement to preserve its own democratic rights, which are also under attack. In the public sector, *Berufsverbote* (employment bans) have been imposed on workers in recent years for holding "extremist" views. These particularly target left-wing, Muslim and pro-Palestinian workers and weaken the labor movement as a whole. All workers have an interest in opposing this. It is none of the bosses' business what a worker's political or religious beliefs are. Likewise, all workers should defend provisions that protect transgender people from having to disclose their birth name and gender to employers even after transitioning, setting them up for attacks or unwanted outings in the workplace.

The fact that trans people are now being turned into scapegoats by the right wing only serves the ruling class. They are the ones who benefit when different segments of the population are pitted against one another and when conservative family values come back in vogue. This is how they advance their reactionary agenda. To build broad unity against the capitalists and their government, the labor movement needs the most oppressed layers of society on its side, including LGBTQ+ people.

Everyone knows we are light-years away from this necessary unity. The problem is that the leadership of the Left Party (as well as the union leaders) supports not only the "firewall" but also, as a matter of principle, the government's pro-NATO course, which is concretely expressed in their solidarity with Ukraine and their support for sanctions against Russia that are directly leading to further misery. This is why the Left Party leadership does not want to stir up political turmoil within the unions against the SPD, which still holds the top positions in the unions and seeks to stabilize the government in which it is itself represented. This is also why all the strikes of recent years have been sold out, and the consequences of the multiple crises have been borne by the population. And so the Left Party is making itself even more unpopular among workers, who continue to turn to the AfD. The only way for the LGBTQ+ component of the Left Party to break out of the liberal mold and win over workers is by fighting for a militant leadership that stands against NATO and German imperialism.

Fight for a New Leadership of the Left Party!

The current leadership around Heidi Reichinnek, Jan van Aken and Ines Schwerdtner drapes itself in the colors of queer liberation but betrays it through its "firewall" policy and its defense of the crumbling liberal order. Its betrayal of the Palestine movement also does absolutely nothing to win over Muslims as allies. We need a genuine opposition party that is attractive to workers and the oppressed and truly defends the LGBTQ+ movement.

The left wing of the Left Party, which does consistently oppose militarization, rearmament and NATO, has so far shied away from the struggle for leadership and is trying to convince the right wing and the leadership through heated debates. We can and must win over individual members to our side, especially LGBTQ+ members who are looking for a real way out. But the leadership of the Left Party has, in practice, decided to defend the interests of German imperialism. This is evident once again as they refuse to defend Iran against the imperialists. The likes of Schwerdtner, van Aken and Reichinnek do not belong in a party that calls itself left wing.

There is agreement on this with some youth organizations of the Left Party and with revolutionary groups such as Sozialistische Organisation Solidarität (part of the Committee for a Workers International), the Gruppe Arbeiter-Innenmacht (Workers Power), and the Revolutionäre Internationalistische Organisation (affiliated with the Permanent Revolution current), who, like us, are active within the Left Party and fight for LGBTQ+ liberation. All revolutionaries must now unite within the left wing to form a powerful current and coordinate the struggle for a change of course. Pride-Rebellion (affiliated with the socialist group Young Struggle), another significant revolutionary group fighting for queer liberation that stands outside the Left Party, must also join the struggle. However, these groups still advocate a liberal program on many points (such as support for the "firewall" policy or demands for "open borders"). This ***undermines*** the struggle against unity with the right wing and the party's pro-imperialist leadership. We can only move forward if we break the chains that bind us, through the Left Party leadership, to the government and thus to the capitalists. This is the only way to truly defend LGBTQ+ and build the revolutionary party needed to liberate all the oppressed. ■

Greece

How to Defend Women Against Violence and Misery

O Bolsevikos

Ancient theater of Epidaurus, August 2025: *The Oresteia* performance. This ancient Greek tragedy portrays how Orestes is acquitted for his mother's murder. As Engels said, *The Oresteia* represents "the conflict between declining mother-right and the new father-right that arose."

BY ALEXANDRA DIMOU

As living conditions collapse, women in Greece are being pushed ever deeper into insecurity, violence and fear. The facts are stark and revealing: reports of domestic violence have skyrocketed from 4,500 annually before 2020 to over 22,000 in 2024, and 31.4% of women report that they have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. The murder of women has become commonplace, with nearly two femicides every month. And those are only the ones reported to the police.

The murder of 28-year-old Kyriaki Griva exposed the role of the state in the most brutal way. She asked the police for protection. They refused. "The patrol car is not a taxi," was their response. Minutes later, she was murdered by her ex-partner outside the police station, in front of the police guard, in full view of the surveillance cameras.

A 43-year-old woman shot at pointblank range by her ex.

A 40-year-old woman who died after months in hospital following abuse by her partner.

Georgia, 53, who survived nine and a half months before succumbing to injuries inflicted by her husband.

An 85-year-old woman killed by her spouse, who then took his own life.

Ο ΜΠΟΛΣΕΒΙΚΟΣ 4

ΟΡΓΑΝΟ ΤΗΣ ΤΡΟΤΣΚΙΣΤΙΚΗΣ ΟΜΑΔΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ

Τεύχος 10 ΝΟΕΜΒΡΙΟΣ 2025 €

Της Συντάξης

Έρχονται Δύσκολοι Καιροί

Πώς Διάολο Ηττήθηκε;!

Και συνεχίζεται...
- 164+ θάνατοι στη δουλειά
- 13 ώρες εργασίας
- Δτώ μάλις το βγίεζουν πέρα
- 6 ιδιωτικά πανεπιστήμια
- Εξοβίλωση υγείας

και πολλά άλλα

Προς Τους Εργάτες:

Πώς να Προετοιμάσουμε τις Επόμενες Μάχες

Periodical of Trotskyist Group of Greece

iclfi.org/obol

@toe_icl

These are not isolated tragedies. They are the routine outcomes of a social order in decay. As the saying goes, the progress of civilization can be measured by the progress of women. In Greece, such violence is the predictable outcome of social disintegration, poverty, unemployment, the privatization of healthcare and the dismantling of welfare—all products of a system that treats women's lives as expendable in the service of profit and political stability.

But what is the response of the women's movement, of the left and the feminists, to the brutal murders of so many women? Typically, it is small, isolated and limited one-day symbolic demos on March 8 (International Women's Day), November 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women), or in the aftermath of a woman's murder—especially when the case receives a lot of media attention. Even then, the main response is to raise a series of liberal demands and legal reforms addressed to the state and its institutions for the "improvement" of women's conditions and the protection of women identified as being at risk of violence. These include calling for effective state mechanisms such as shelters, safe spaces, emergency response services and more consistent police interventions, as well as training for police, judiciary and social services to understand and act on gender-based violence.

We are for reforms that can protect women and keep them alive. At the same time, while certain demands of this kind may appear justified in isolation, their fundamental weakness lies in the perspective from which they arise: a perspective rooted in confidence in state institutions such as the police, the courts and the administrative apparatus, whose historical role is the defense and reproduction of the existing social order. Liberal feminism assumes that the state can be neutral or even a protector. Repeatedly, these institutions have not only failed to protect women but have actively participated in concealing and normalizing violence against them.

Both Marxists and feminists fight for many of the same

goals: equal legal rights (in work, education, voting and bodily autonomy), equal pay and opportunities, respect and dignity in both public and private life, the dismantling of sexist stereotypes and, most importantly, an end to harassment and violence against women. The main difference lies in how they understand the roots of these problems and how they propose to solve them.

A Marxist approach argues that violence and gender oppression are not isolated behaviors or purely cultural issues; they are deeply connected to the material and economic conditions of society. From this perspective, the existing state and its institutions cannot provide a permanent solution because they help maintain the very social and economic system that produces inequality. Therefore, for Marxists, defending women in the here and now requires not only demanding legal reforms but also confronting and transforming the material conditions that generate violence in the first place.

Femicide Law

Whether femicide should be formally recognized as a separate crime under the Penal Code is a really loaded question in Greece. At present, the killing of women is legally treated as homicide or aggravated homicide. On one side of the debate are the left, the feminists and the center and left bourgeois parties, and on the other side the New Democracy (ND) government and the right-wing parties, which oppose any legislation recognizing femicide. This resistance stems from a mix of legal, political and cultural factors. In Greek society, where traditional gender roles remain dominant and conservatism is strong, there is opposition to explicitly stating that some killings are murders linked to gender/power dynamics. As they say, "What happens at home stays at home," it's "personal business."

To be clear, we are not opposed to the recognition of femicide. But the reality is that even if it were to be formally recognized, this alone would neither stop nor likely reduce the number of brutal murders of women by their spouses or family members.

The way the debate is framed narrows the problem and shifts responsibility almost exclusively onto the right-wing

Workers Solidarity

Athens, April 2023: Socialist Workers Party and Antarsya banner reads "Down with the Government of Sexism."

Kontarinis/EUROKINISSI

Athens, June 2021: Syriza youth banner reads "Call It by Its Name: Femicide."

ND government for refusing legal recognition. Some left parties treat the issue as an ideological difference. For example, the SEK (Socialist Workers Party, part of the Antarsya anticapitalist alliance) calls to overturn the "government of sexism," which it holds responsible for femicides. By presenting one section of the bourgeoisie as chauvinist, this logic risks conciliating its so-called progressive wing. Thus, bourgeois parties that support legal recognition of femicide (such as PASOK, Syriza, and Plefsi Eleftherias) are portrayed as part of the solution rather than part of the problem. This accommodation of bourgeois elements can only end in defeat.

Ultimately, this approach confines the struggle to a narrow legalistic framework, treating femicide primarily as a problem of inadequate legislation rather than a product of concrete social and economic relations. By separating femicide from the broader conditions of exploitation, precarity and women's material dependence, it obscures the roots of gender-based violence.

At the same time, this framework serves to rehabilitate the state and its institutions, presenting them as neutral guarantors of justice despite their systematic failure to protect women and their active role in reproducing the existing social order. Legal recognition becomes a substitute for real accountability, while the police, courts and social services remain incapable of—or unwilling to—prevent violence.

Most critically, this strategy displaces class struggle as the central axis of liberation. It replaces collective working-class organization with legal solutions and institutional mediation, weakening both the fight against femicide and the broader struggle for women's emancipation. Without a proletarian strategy that confronts exploitation, insecurity and the privatization of social care, the roots of gender-based violence remain untouched.

The Conditions of Life

To understand the forces that continually reproduce reaction and keep women oppressed, we must return to a fundamental Marxist truth: emancipation cannot be achieved through formal rights alone but only through changing the material conditions of life. Reforms may temporarily ease

pressures, but because they leave the social relations that generate oppression intact, they inevitably will not last or be enough. Every democratic gain and every improvement in women's position will remain fragile and reversible.

The surge in violence didn't come out of nowhere. In some countries this is a new crisis, but in Greece it is the continuation of a long emergency—from the economic crisis that started in 2008 to the collapse of the banks, the Covid pandemic a few years later and on to today. Families substitute for the already weak welfare state, women substitute for public care, and insecurity becomes the cost of "adjustment" and "resilience." Under the dictates of the IMF, the entire country came to its knees—men and women alike.

It is the EU and U.S. finance capitalists who control and dictate every aspect of Greece's economic and political life—the imposition of debt bondage, the subjugation of the country's finances through the imposition of the euro, the theft of national assets and natural resources, the decimation of the country's already meager industrial capacity and the intensified exploitation of workers as cheap labor. In a country subjugated by imperialism, increasing global instability and the rightward political shift only intensify these pressures.

The economic impact of Covid restrictions was particularly severe for women: 60% of Greek women reported a drop in income and 59% experienced a deterioration in work–life balance. Nearly one in three felt they had become more financially dependent on their partner as a result of the crisis, indicating a decline in economic autonomy. Some 93% believe that violence against women increased during the pandemic—the highest percentage in the EU—while nearly six in ten report that the restrictions seriously affected their mental health. Feelings of being confined at home (54%) and heightened levels of stress and anxiety shaped their daily lives more than in other European countries.

There is a direct connection between the rise in violence and in murders of women and the deterioration of social conditions caused by intensified imperialist exploitation. The same national oppression and backwardness that weighs down on women crushes the entire working class, which has a direct material interest in linking the fight for women's liberation to its own emancipation. Without making this link, proposed solutions remain partial and cannot address the root causes of this brutal reality or effectively defend women in the present. Those are the conditions that we need to fight to change. Unless the conditions of everyday life are fundamentally transformed, women will never stop being oppressed.

Karahalis/Reuters

Athens, October 2011: Women workers played central role fighting austerity imposed by EU and U.S. imperialism.

Proposals for Immediate Action

The current context is extremely difficult. Economic pressure, political instability, rising social inequality and the deterioration of public services create conditions in which insecurity and fear grow. In such circumstances, women and workers are often the first to feel the impact: through high inflation, low wages, precarious employment, unemployment, 13-hour workdays, etc. Periods of crisis also tend to coincide with increases in gender-based violence and greater vulnerability for migrants and the most marginalized. This situation makes an immediate defensive struggle necessary—not as a retreat, but as organized resistance to further decline.

In opposition to the strategy of placing liberal demands on the state, we affirm that women's defense can be achieved only through the independent organization and struggle of the masses themselves. This requires women to look to the working class as the only force with both the capacity and the interest to change material conditions. In this difficult context, we must build a united front around basic demands drawing in men and women, native Greeks and migrants alike.

Only by building working-class unity around such a program can we both defend against current attacks and begin to dismantle the material foundations of the entire system on which women's oppression rests. The defense of women is therefore inseparable from the defense of the living standards of the entire working class.

We demand:

A living wage for working women. A wage high enough to cover the real cost of living and allow women to live with dignity and independence—not merely to survive. Economic independence is a precondition for freedom from abusive or oppressive relationships.

Union protection for women workers. We cannot effectively confront workplace harassment unless unions take active responsibility for defending their female members and co-workers. ***Organize women into the unions!***

Women's right to defend themselves. While self-defense alone will not eliminate femicide, it will definitely make abusers think twice about their decisions if they face an equal threat to their own safety.

Stop the collapse of the National Health System. The public health system, once presented as a model of universal and equitable care, is now on the verge of collapse. This particularly affects women, especially those on low incomes, by restricting access to essential services.

End the economic domination of the country by the EU and the IMF. No social progress is possible as long as the country is financially strangled by the imperialists. To stop the collapse of infrastructure and rebuild the social services we need, we must raise the slogan: ***cancel the debt!*** ■

Gathering of Women and LGBTQ+ Activists

Women Under Attack in Milei's Argentina

BY JULIA EMERY

Last November, ICL comrades participated for the first time in the Plurinational Gathering of Women and LGBTQ+ activists in Corrientes, Argentina. Now in its 38th year, this feminist event brought together over 70,000 activists from around the country for three days of political debate. The event included opening and closing mass rallies, two marches, a host of cultural activities and 116 workshops on topics ranging from abortion rights, gender violence, healthcare, sex education and prostitution to unemployment, racism, indigenous peoples, Palestine, anti-imperialism and union organizing.

Unions, particularly in education and healthcare, were heavily represented alongside organizations ranging from the Peronists to Trotskyists and Maoists (often in the form of their affiliated women's, trans and/or sexual diversity groups). Community organizations, artists and youth also participated.

The backdrop for the gathering was the drastic attacks on living standards carried out by the right-wing Milei government in the last two years. In his speech in Davos in January 2025, Milei led the charge for the far right internationally, denouncing the "murderous abortion agenda," likening gender ideology to child abuse and declaring war on feminism, all forms of diversity and inclusion, immigration and environmentalism. These aren't empty words. In Argentina itself, funding has been slashed for education, public health and social programs. One of Milei's first acts in government was to close the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity.

While the impact is felt by the entire population, women are bearing a heavier brunt since they are disproportionately employed in sectors subject to austerity, and it is women who have to pick up the slack for cuts to social services like day care, soup kitchens and care of the elderly. The government, backed by the Church, is threatening to roll back abortion, access to hormone treatments for trans people and sex education.

In a climate of economic and social crisis, violence against women is growing while the paltry means that exist to combat it are being slashed. In 2025, there were 266 killings of women and trans people. Most were victims of domestic abuse. Meanwhile, widespread cuts have affected the government's Acompañar program, which provided psychological, social and economic support to women and LGBTQ+ people fleeing domestic violence. This included a monthly subsidy equivalent to the minimum wage for six months. Insufficient as this was, it did allow victims of abuse to move away from violent partners and pay rent elsewhere. In 2023, over 100,000 women and LGBTQ+ people used these services, but in 2024 this dropped to 3,500 before being practically eliminated in 2025.

Coffrini/AFP

Davos, January 2025: Argentina's president Javier Milei leads the charge against abortion rights, feminism, diversity and inclusion.

The gathering had quite a contradictory character. On the one hand, the event is unique in the world in bringing together women from a range of backgrounds to debate political strategy. For some, coming to this event meant they could set aside their childcare and other domestic responsibilities for three days and take part in political discussion to shape the fight for their ***own*** interests. Some attendees had never spoken in public before; the event helps build confidence in their own strength and is therefore a real gain.

On the other hand, the political solutions on offer were hugely inadequate. The general tenor of the event was feminist and liberal, and it was dominated by the Peronists through their political organizations and through the unions. Their central perspective is to push hope in a new Peronist

Women & Revolution

November 2025: Demonstration held as part of women's gathering in Corrientes.

government in the 2027 presidential elections. This was a common refrain in the workshops, as many women think this will ensure that their rights enshrined in law will be protected and that resources will be restored to social programs. But in the two years of Milei's government, the Peronists have shown that they're not capable of defending the gains they themselves introduced, let alone winning new ones.

The Fight for Women's Liberation Must Be Anti-Imperialist

To the Peronist perspective of confronting Milei at the ballot box, the Marxist left counterposes struggle in the streets. Many argue that what's necessary is to revive the Green Tide movement—the large mobilizations of the late 2010s, which resulted in abortion through the 14th week being legalized in 2020. Obviously, such mobilizations are sorely needed. However, it is also necessary to understand that the global context in which we are struggling today has changed significantly. U.S. imperialism is hell-bent on squeezing oppressed countries like Argentina, particularly through the IMF debt, mandating mass austerity and seizing the country's mineral resources. This oppression conditions every aspect of Argentina's economy, and Trump is fully prepared to use the U.S. military to carry out the imperialists' will when they face a serious challenge. Demonstrations, however large they may be, won't be sufficient to counter this. It is necessary to put forward a ***program*** to confront U.S. imperialism, starting with the repudiation of the foreign debt. This is what the leadership of the workers movement has so far refused to do. Our 19 January 2024 *Spartacist* supplement, "To Defeat Milei, Fight for National Liberation," was hugely popular at the gathering.

As we wrote in "Anti-Imperialism & Women's Liberation" (*Women & Revolution* No. 46, February 2025):

> "To combat conservative social reaction that strives to roll back gains for women, it is necessary to attack the material foundations that give rise to it: the imperialist oppression of the nation. This means that the fight for the advancement of women must be part of fighting for the overall development of society in opposition to imperialist subjugation."

The fight for women's emancipation is inseparable from the struggle for national and social liberation. Significant resources are needed to provide free, quality healthcare, education for all, childcare and assistance to women fleeing domestic violence. These resources cannot be obtained while Argentina's entire economy is subordinated to repaying the imperialist debt. They must be wrested from the imperialists' hands.

This was the problem of the Peronists in government. They were able to introduce some supportable reforms, and the Kirchner governments are often credited with paying down the IMF debt. They did temporarily get the IMF off Argentina's back, but they did it by handing over nearly US$10 billion to the imperialists, money that could have been used to develop the country. More importantly, because the Peronists represent the class interests of a wing of the bourgeoisie, they were and are not willing to actually confront U.S. imperialism. They are incapable of breaking the endless cycle of Argentinian politics: Peronist governments introduce social reforms but simultaneously drive the economy into the ground, only to be replaced with right-wing governments that further enslave the country to the IMF while reversing many of the gains achieved in the past.

Women: Look to the Working Class

To unify the working class for the necessary fight against imperialism, it is necessary to reject legalistic and divisive solutions. The feminist movement in Argentina—both the Peronist and the socialist components—suffers from many of the same problems as the liberal feminists in the imperialist countries. One of these, widespread at the gathering, is to look to the courts and state institutions to protect women's rights. This includes calls to strengthen the penalties for femicide or for the laws on abortion and gender identity to actually be implemented. While many of these demands are supportable, the perspective they stem from relies on government institutions, which are in the hands of the ruling class and are used to enforce rapidly deteriorating social conditions.

Free Cristina Fernández de Kirchner!

La Campora

Corrientes, November 2025: Rally to free Cristina (shown inset).

Baglietto/NurPhoto

At the November 2025 Women's Gathering in Corrientes, Argentina, there were many illusions in former Peronist president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who addressed a rally calling for her freedom via audio link from house arrest. One of the reasons for her popularity is that she was part of the Peronist governments that introduced welcome reforms such as mandatory sex education in 2006, the Gender Identity Law in 2012 and legalized abortion in 2020. All these gains are now under attack.

Following Trump's re-election, Cristina was barred from entering the U.S. and placed under house arrest on old corruption charges at the behest of the U.S. Embassy—a blatant move to prevent her from running for office. While Cristina may well be guilty of corruption, her detention is clearly a political move by U.S. imperialism and its loyal servant, the Milei government, to suppress opposition.

We call for Cristina's release! Her politics ***do*** need to be defeated, but not by the imperialists. What we need to win lasting gains for women is a consciously organized revolutionary party prepared to confront both the imperialists ***and*** its lackeys in the national bourgeoisie.

More importantly, as Marx explained, the legal structure of a society can never rise above the economic foundations that sustain it. The higher the level of economic and social development, the more rights and resources women gain. Conversely, in times of major economic crisis, social services are the first thing to be cut and women are disproportionately affected by austerity, a rise in violence, etc. While it's important to defend every gain women have fought for, the idea that major advances can be secured through the courts and government institutions while the capitalists are waging a brutal austerity drive is a dangerous illusion.

Another widespread idea at the gathering was that women's oppression can be overcome by fighting *machista* ideas in men's heads, or by symbolic measures such as encouraging the use of inclusive language. Backward ideas—pushed by the ruling class to divide the oppressed—are a product of poverty, overcrowded housing, unemployment, and the brutalization of daily existence under capitalism. Moral appeals and consciousness-raising campaigns cannot substitute for transforming the social conditions that generate oppression in the first place. In fact, they often end up fueling reactionaries like Milei, who appeal to men's resentment for being blamed for the oppression of others.

To advance their struggles, women must turn to the working class because it is the only social force with the power to confront Milei's government and the imperialist interests behind its austerity program by shutting down the country. This requires maximum unity: every attempt to divide the working class—between women and men, employed and unemployed, unionized and non-unionized—strengthens the ruling class. Women must fight alongside their male co-workers. This does not mean setting aside the fight for women's liberation. It means men must be won to actively support and defend the full emancipation of women, just as women must play a leading role in the struggle to liberate the working class as a whole.

Overcoming the Divide Between the Left and the Peronist Unions

A major obstacle to building the necessary unity against the ruling class is the hostility we saw between women trade unionists and the Marxist left. This was sharply posed in a workshop we attended on union organizing, which included workers from different regions of Argentina, most of whom

Drop the Charges Against Vanina Biasi!

Anita Pouchard Serra/Bloomberg

The prosecution of Vanina Biasi represents a dangerous attempt to silence critics of Israel and restrict the democratic rights of political activists in Argentina. Vanina—a prominent leader of the Partido Obrero (PO) and elected parliamentary representative for the city of Buenos Aires—is facing criminal charges over tweets from 2023 denouncing Israel's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

Vanina is also a union leader representing staff at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and a well-known activist in the women's movement in Argentina. To its credit, the UBA Teachers Union has taken up her defense, noting that

> "The statements for which Vanina Biasi is being charged were in no way discriminatory or anti-Semitic; they were denunciations of the genocide perpetrated against the Palestinian people. This judicial persecution seeks to silence any dissenting voice regarding this massacre."
> —agduba.org.ar, 8 April 2025

Just recently, a Buenos Aires court ratified the acquittal of another Trotskyist leader, Alejandro Bodart, on similar charges. This is a significant victory which could help Vanina.

Vanina's case is part of a broader international campaign to intimidate those who solidarize with the Palestinians. This includes the wave of repression against student encampments in the U.S., the banning of Palestine Action in Britain and the prosecution of pro-Palestinian activists on terrorism charges across Western Europe. For its part, the Milei government has declared unconditional support for Netanyahu while seeking to strengthen Argentina's strategic alignment with Washington.

This is not the first time the Milei government has come for PO. Since his election in 2023, it has attempted to discredit, criminalize and persecute the PO-led "piquetero" organizations of unemployed workers while gutting funds for social services like soup kitchens and savagely repressing their demonstrations.

The international workers movement must come to the defense of Vanina, PO and all activists facing similar charges. This will strengthen workers' defense against attacks on their own jobs and livelihoods by the Milei government in the service of the U.S. imperialist vultures.

were Peronists, as well as supporters of Pan y Rosas, the feminist organization linked to the Trotskyist PTS. When the discussion turned to the obstacles to uniting the left and the unions to fight Milei, Pan y Rosas speakers accused the unions of being undemocratic and not sufficiently combative (which is certainly true), while the Peronists complained that the left refuses to recognize that Peronism introduced real gains that, for example, got their kids free education and access to healthcare.

Spartacist

May Day 2024: ICL intervening at Trotskyist demonstration in Buenos Aires.

At the center of the conflict was the left's attitude toward the unions themselves. Several Peronist trade unionists criticized the left for dividing the unions by splitting away and forming competing structures when they lose a vote. One woman forcefully raised the slogan "No to the fragmentation of the unions!", arguing that this division only weakens the working class. For communists, there is no substitute for working within the existing unions to build a ***different leadership*** through patient, consistent struggle. Undermining class unity, or seeking shortcuts by elevating other social sectors as substitutes for the organized working class, can only further disorganize the workers movement and strengthen the hand of the ruling class.

When a speaker called for a united front of the trade unions against imperialism, the room erupted in applause—with the notable exception of Pan y Rosas. The working-class women came away with the impression that Pan y Rosas was not committed to either trade-union unity or the fight for national liberation.

There ***is*** a communist answer that can bridge this gap between the unions and the left. The left must recognize and defend the real gains won under Peronism and understand that the fight for national liberation in countries oppressed by imperialism is not a diversion but is, in fact, central to the fight for social liberation. At the same time, workers must confront the fact that successive Peronist governments have presided over economic decline, disillusionment and decay, creating the conditions for Milei's victory. It is urgent to mount an effective resistance to Milei based on mobilizing the unions, which are now being directly attacked by his labor reform law, and the Peronists are not doing this. The way forward is to fight within the existing unions for a ***communist leadership*** in which women will have a central role. ■

The Philippines: Neocolonial Prison

The Philippines is governed by an especially vicious breed of bourgeois oligarchs. Foreign finance capital drains the country's wealth, while the ruling families rely on American money and guns to keep themselves in power and the impoverished workers and peasants under foot. Mass poverty and underdevelopment make it impossible to placate the masses with reforms, so the oligarchs respond to the most basic demands—land to the tiller, collective bargaining, even birth control—with harsh repression. The defense of courageous activists like Amanda Echanis and the Tacloban 5 is a vital part of the national liberation struggle against the bourgeois oligarchs, who work hand-in-glove with the U.S. empire to keep the people enslaved.

Hands Off the Tacloban 5!

Held without trial for six years, community journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio and Mariel Domequil of Rural Missionaries of the Philippines were convicted in January of financing terrorism and sentenced to 12-18 years in prison. Their "crime" was to raise money for an independent radio program and for humanitarian aid.

Frenchie Mae and Mariel were arrested in midnight raids in Tacloban City in February 2020 alongside three other activists. Marissa Cabaljao, spokesperson for the climate justice group People's Surge Network, and Mira Legion of the National Democratic alliance BAYAN have been released on bail, but Alexander Philip Abinguna from the Karapatan human rights organization remains behind bars facing fabricated charges of murder. The persecution of the Tacloban 5 is intended to silence their opposition to death-squad terror and the destruction of livelihoods brought about by imperialist impositions on the Philippines. Drop the charges against the Tacloban 5!

Sarmago/ZUMA

Manila, 21 January: Journalists and allied organizations demand freedom for Tacloban 5.

Victory

Amanda Echanis Is Free!

Free Amanda Echanis Movement

The Philippine left won a victory on January 14. Amanda Echanis, organizer for the National Democratic Amihan peasant women's federation and acclaimed poet, was released after more than five years in prison. Amanda had been arrested—with her month-old baby—in December 2020, after security forces planted firearms, ammunition and explosives while carrying out a dawn search of her lodgings. Her frame-up was part of a brutal crackdown ordered by former president Rodrigo Duterte and carried out using military and police raids and planted evidence. While we celebrate Amanda's freedom, she should never have spent a day in prison. Hundreds of political prisoners still languish behind prison walls. We extend them our solidarity and continue to demand their immediate release.

Britain

Why the Left Is Failing Lucy Letby

BY VINCENT DAVID

In August 2023, Lucy Letby, a neonatal nurse at the Countess of Chester Hospital in Britain, was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of seven babies and attempted murder of six others back in 2015 and 2016. Letby was labeled in the press as one of the worst serial killers in British history, an "angel of death" preying on premature infants. But since her conviction, countless voices—medical experts, statisticians, journalists and even a prominent retired detective—have debunked the entire prosecution's case. A growing chorus of experts has come out not only to argue that her conviction is unsafe, but that Letby is innocent, that no murders happened at the Countess of Chester, and that the prosecution's evidence was at best flawed and at worst fabricated.

It has become clear that Lucy Letby was scapegoated. The Countess of Chester Hospital—like most hospitals in the UK—was hugely understaffed, underfunded and decrepit. Sewage was frequently coming up the pipes. Multiple drug-resistant superbugs were present. Doctors and nurses were in constant shortage. As the number of infant deaths spiked, hospital management and consultants did what they do best: they blamed the staff. This is when suspicions around Letby mounted and she was removed from neonatal care. But Letby fought back. She filed a grievance through her union and, against all odds, won. The consultants were made to apologize to her. They then went to the police…

The story of Lucy Letby is one of a nurse, a working-class woman and a trade-union member, caught in the crisis of the National Health Service (NHS) and framed to cover up its failure. One would think that the trade unions and the socialist left would be on the front line of her defense. But no. Not a single trade union has spoken up in defense of Letby, including her own union, which went silent after the police got involved. Prominent left-wing outlets like Novara Media endorsed her conviction back in 2023 and have remained silent since. Groups like the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party wrote articles claiming she is guilty—and have said nothing since. In fact, our own comrades have been accused by Socialist Party members of defending a "baby killer." In general, on the left, anyone raising doubts about Letby's conviction is quickly labeled a conspiracy theorist in bed with right-wing forces. This is because the silence on the left has meant that the main political voices defending Letby have come from the right, from Reform UK supporters to Tory MP David Davis.

The reason for this is quite simple: Letby's case is unpopular among liberal and middle-class elements. These people, who are the main constituency of the "left," believe in the justice system and dismiss frame-ups as conspiracy theories. Defending Letby necessarily means becoming unpopular in this crowd, which is why prominent left-wing figures or trade-union leaders won't touch it with a ten-foot pole. In turn, the defense of Letby resonates strongly among working-class people, particularly among those who look to Reform UK or who work in the NHS. The reason for this is that they have nothing but distrust for the powers that be and hate the establishment.

The case of Lucy Letby exposes everything that is wrong with the socialist movement today. If huge swaths of working-class people are turning to the right, it is precisely because on the left they only find defenders of the status quo, mainly worried about upsetting liberals or trade-union leaders subservient to the Labour government.

We of the Spartacist League, together with the Partisan Defence Committee, have been virtually the only socialists campaigning for Letby. The silence and opposition of the rest of the left to our effort is a huge betrayal and a scathing exposure of its blind faith in capitalist institutions. We know that many members of socialist groups actually agree with us. Fight for your group to take a public stand! It is crucial for Lucy Letby and for all NHS workers who could be the next scapegoats and who have been cowed into silence by this conviction. But it is also crucial to detach the socialist movement from the liberals. ■

Workers Hammer

Birmingham, England, 7 November 2025: Rally initiated by Partisan Defence Committee.

Working Men: Keep Our Sisters Safe!

Amber Czech 2005–2025

Portraits by Cindy

This 17 December 2025 letter from a skilled woman worker in a union was originally printed in Workers Vanguard *No. 1188 (20 December 2025).*

Amber Czech, a 20-year-old welder, was murdered with a sledgehammer while working at a Minnesota factory on November 11. Her killer, a 40-year-old co-worker, told police that he "didn't like her" and had been planning to murder her for some time. As far as I know, Amber was not a union member and didn't have the minimum safety protections of a union. This atrocity sparked discussions among union sisters about how under attack they feel at overwhelmingly male worksites. Amber's murder recalls the 2017 murder of Outi Hicks, a black woman union carpenter apprentice who was bludgeoned to death by a male co-worker on the job.

Working men: We are counting on you to keep us safe. Women workers: The bosses are to blame for your unsafe conditions, and the government always protects the bosses. You must look to trustworthy class brothers and sisters for your protection. Let's organize to stand up for women! The most important thing is to organize all non-union workplaces and apprentices into fighting unions that defend all their members, including women, black people and other oppressed minorities.

Building trades union leaders have issued statements decrying Amber's murder and all attacks against women. But what solutions do they offer? NABTU promotes its "RESPECT program" for "labor-management cooperation" to "address head-on toxic cultures." The SMART union's Women's Committee says, "We call on employers, contractors, supervisors and every person on a job site to confront the culture that allowed this to happen." Instead of unionization drives and a union-centered fight for women, they offer man-shaming feminist schemes for women to seek protection by talking to the bosses.

These responses are typical of union bureaucrats who tell women workers to go to Human Resources (i.e., management) or joint management-union offices to report harassment. If women refuse to rat out a co-worker, they are usually expected to just suffer in silence. Consistent with their pro-capitalist strategy, the bureaucrats look to the bosses, government and cops to protect women and, at the same time, claim it's divisive to talk about women's oppression. Both are wrong.

Fighting for women according to the bosses' rules is a losing game for all workers. We need to organize to protect women on the job from dangerous lunatics, stalkers and anti-woman bigots. If more women workers experienced men uniting to say, "Leave her alone" or "She's not into you, brother" or "If you have a problem with her, you will have a problem with us," women would stop believing that their only option is to report abusive workers to the abusive bosses or a government agency. At the same time, this would protect innocent men from employer provocations and false accusations.

Paradoxically, "Zero Tolerance" rules against workplace violence keep women less safe. They discourage good men from stepping up against abusive men and putting the fear of god in them to leave a woman alone. The "Zero Tolerance" company policies target pro-union militants and are racist against black men, who can be punished for merely displaying anger, let alone intimidating an anti-woman coward. ***The unions, not the bosses, should have full control over whether and how to discipline workers.***

With unemployment rising and fewer jobs available, there will be more divide-and-conquer hostility to women in a "man's job." Trump has warned employers who receive government contracts to purge women and black people or else, under the bigoted presumption they were hired without "merit" (see Executive Order 14173). The purpose of the "anti-DEI" purge is to weaken the entire working class.

We need to fight for jobs for all and a shorter workweek with no loss in pay. As long as unemployment is accepted and there is a scramble for a shrinking piece of the pie, many workingmen will see women co-workers as competitors. Mobilizing workers to fight for more for everyone will undermine craft prejudices that cause skilled tradesmen to see themselves as the "chosen few" and to be hostile to outsiders. While fighting against the bosses' macho speedup schemes and demanding more job opportunities, the building trades unions should launch aggressive campaigns to recruit women and minority workers.

The way out of this dog-eat-dog world is for all workers in the building trades to put the interests of our class first. Organizing all the unorganized and defending women workers as equals on the job would strengthen the fighting capacity of the unions as a whole. That's the best way to honor Amber and Outi. ■

Trade Unionists Respond

***Women & Revolution* received these letters from our readers. We invite you to get in touch in order to share your opinions, agreements and disagreements. Write to spartacist@spartacist.org.**

Women in Trades: Fight Together with Men Against the Bosses!

March 19, 2026

Dear comrades,

As a retired woman worker, I was struck by the murder of 20-year-old Amber Czech at a Minnesota factory. This is the worst of what women face in nontraditional jobs. I was the only woman apprentice in the stamping department of an auto assembly plant when an incident occurred—out of the many demeaning injustices and attempts at humiliation I had faced throughout the years in the trades—that has stuck with me.

During a crash of automated machinery, a group of us gathered to organize getting the line back up and running. A journeyman instructed me to start rebuilding a damaged component. A group of us had begun working at a large worktable when the union head of the apprentices, who also worked in the department, showed up to throw his "authority" around. He ordered me to go be fire watch—a well-known tactic used to sideline those deemed useless in a high-pressure situation when it was all hands on deck.

At first, I ignored the union rep, knowing he was trying to insult me. But as he demanded it a couple of times, I refused, just saying I had been given work to do. At that point he lost it. Not wanting to be shown up in front of men, he started screaming at me calling me a c---. He also ranted that he ordered me to be fire watch not because of what was between my legs and not to flatter myself about that. The guys around me were open-mouthed in shock. The union bureaucrat went on for a minute but given that I ignored him and kept working, he eventually walked away. Of course he wasn't going to do any work!

Only after the rep left did the guys defend me. They said what had happened was outrageous and urged me to go to management and get the guy fired. I told them I would only report the incident to the union; that the bosses should not be involved. This was something to be settled amongst ourselves. After all, the unions were built and are tools of struggle through which workers can organize and defend themselves independently, resisting the power of their bosses who exploit them.

After finishing the work, I reported the incident to my shop steward, who insisted on a meeting together with the union rep and management. I refused, not wanting to involve the bosses in a union matter. Some of the guys, not seeing the importance of using the union, went to management on their own. Throughout this whole ordeal I stood my ground, not giving in to any of the pressures.

Some might question what was gained given that the union rep managed to maintain his post for a time. Yet despite this, he was ostracized by his co-workers and exposed for who he was. More importantly, it showed in practice the necessity of fighting within the union for a new leadership. It is relatively easy for bosses to fire workers; however, challenging the sell-out bureaucrats—fighting for the unions, not management, to have full control over whether and how workers are disciplined—is an important battle and gain to win. By uniting, workers can demand dignity on the job and safer conditions (among other things), that are difficult, if not impossible, to secure alone or by relying on the "goodwill" of the bosses. To honor women murdered and abused at work, we must stand together—men and women alike—to defend women workers as equals and strengthen the power of unions as a whole.

Daria Stern

Bring Women in as Equals!

January 7, 2026

Why do we not see many women in the trades? Typically union brothers will respond with, "they are physically incapable" or "they aren't interested." Furthermore, in my experience, a woman worker entering into the construction trades typically gets assigned to a "light duty" position, which creates resentment and judgment among some male workers. It is alienating for women workers who feel like they are just skating by because they are not involved in the construction process, where learning and gaining experience take place and where camaraderie can be established.

Our local representatives, the AFL-CIO and the contractors all shout, "We need more women in the trades!" but this will never be enough. What is required is for union brothers to look out for union sisters who are already involved in the trades. This means union brothers involving women in the work and in the conversations, just as we would for any male worker apprentice who seeks to be better at their craft and included in meaningful work.

Brock McLaughlin,
a Roofers and Waterproofers Union brother

Communist Longshorewoman Speaks

E. Turnbull

We are proud to publish this excerpt of an interview with Emily Turnbull, retired longshorewoman (dock worker) and founder of ILWU Local 10's Committee to End Tier Segregation. Emily was elected to the local executive board in late 2023 on a program that committed her to using her elected post to mobilize members against the divisions that cripple the union's power. (See "Equal Pay, Benefits and Union Rights for All!" *Workers Vanguard* (*WV*) No. 1183, 18 December 2024.) She ran for Local 10 president in late 2024, receiving 20 percent of the vote, on a platform that calls for the working class to form its own party and fight for power.

* * *

Tell us what you did in the industry.

I just retired after 22 years as a longshorewoman in the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 in the San Francisco Bay Area. In the Bay Area the longshore workforce is majority black and some 20 percent female—the percentage of women may be a bit higher now. I wasn't as much an oddity for being a woman as I was for being white.

As ILWU longshoremen, we report to a hiring hall to pick up our job assignment every day. As an entry-level worker (casual or B-man) I often got the job of installing twistlocks on the ship containers. Sometimes I had to go onto the ship to "lash" the containers to the deck using long, heavy iron rods and big metal fasteners called turnbuckles. After I graduated to B status, I mostly worked driving tractor trailers to and from the big cranes. Eventually as an A-man, I got enough seniority to regularly work as a clerk. This job often requires computer work and pays almost as much as a heavy equipment operator.

WV *published a letter about Amber Czech's murder. What were your thoughts? Did you experience anti-woman bigotry in your time at the job and, if so, how did you deal with it?*

I was horrified by Amber Czech's murder. I thought the letter to *WV* made some powerful points, especially that "workplace violence" rules can make work ***more*** dangerous for women. I know of cases where men have stood up and defended women being harassed. But there is always the danger that they themselves will be charged with "workplace violence."

There have been two ILWU women's conferences of late, but they are geared toward grooming women for positions in the union bureaucracy, rather than dealing with the problems they face on the job. The exception is of course the issue of sexual harassment and workplace violence. There is always a session about that, and the bureaucrats preach not union action, but cooperation with and reliance on the PMA [bosses].

There are special grievance procedures, known as the "13.2s," developed for workplace discrimination and violence cases. These 13.2 grievances go directly to a hearing before a special arbitrator. I've been told that these hearings consist of a lot of "he said, she said." The arbitrator decides and metes out the punishment.

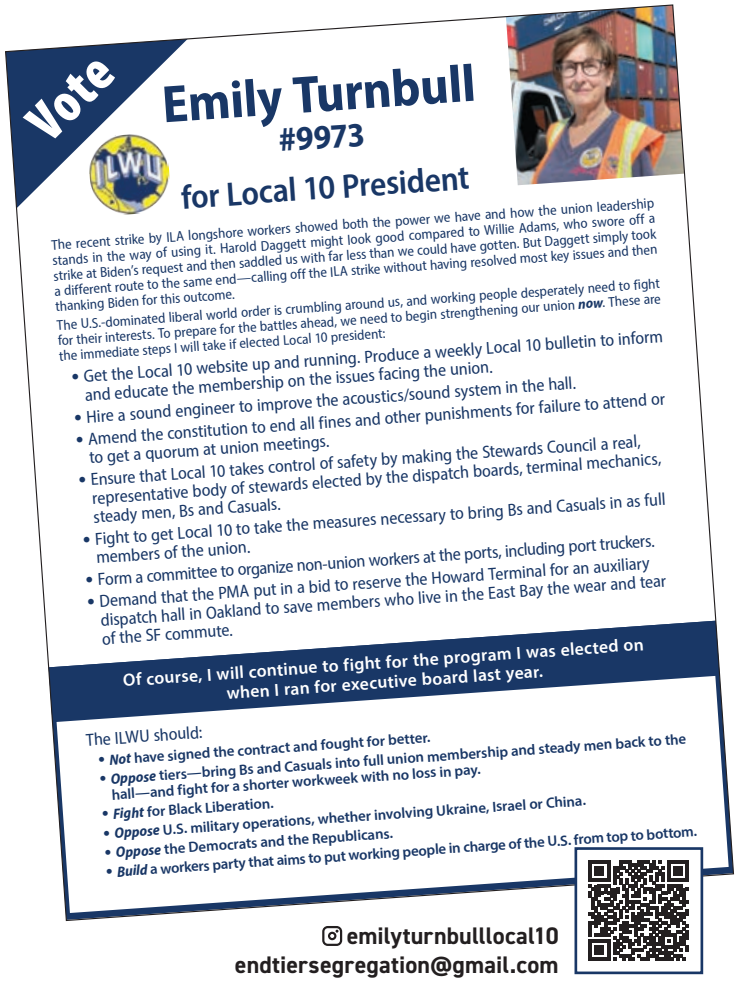
When I was on the executive board the Business Agents (BAs) and other bureaucrats would complain in meetings that there were too many "13.2s" being filed, that people should settle their "personal" issues on their own, that the union was being weakened, etc. Yes the union is being weakened by what are often, I'm told, show trial proceedings, which threaten the livelihoods of those accused.

But it's the union leadership's inaction on the issue that provides grist for the 13.2 mill. They have done nothing to create a union where sexual harassment is just not tolerated. Unfortunately most women think they have no alternative but to file a 13.2 grievance, which goes automatically to the company and to pro-company arbitrators. Though there is supposed to be absolute secrecy about these hearings, word gets out. Women are gossiped about and vilified for it.

I myself never faced any threats or sexual harassment. But I have spoken with many who have. I always argued that 13.2s were not the way to go, and that I personally would never file a 13.2. Instead, harassers should be excoriated and punished by the union. When I was on the executive board, I offered to bring the case of one woman up and fight to bring it to the union meeting floor. But that was the last thing she wanted, since that would only have opened her up to even more scrutiny.

The hush-hush secrecy only creates a rumor mill and just makes the situation worse. I would advise women being harassed to go to the BA or other union official and ask them to tell the brother to lay off. If a harasser wouldn't quit and I was in a leadership position so that I could back the woman up, I would bring the guy up on charges before the union membership of "conduct unbecoming a member."

Before containerization, longshore work was very physically challenging. But now most of the work is driving equipment and women are generally accepted. Some jobs, like lashing, still require real physical strength. I could not handle the very tall lashing poles and had to rely on my male co-workers. But I could handle the shorter lash-



ing poles and I worked hard otherwise (some women shirk and just expect the men to cover). When I finally got my A book and could freely choose my jobs some of the guys said to me, "Are you going to come flex lashing with us?" I replied, "No, I have a medical condition...I'm testosterone-deficient." That got a big laugh. But there are some women who are strong enough to hold their own. I admire them.

Just as it gets whiter the higher up the skill level you go, it also gets more male. I can count the number of women crane drivers on the fingers of one hand. I admire them too. It used to be that women were actively discouraged. One woman I know who signed up for crane training was told—by the union trainer, no less—that she should apply to the clerks local instead! A union leadership that fights for women's equality would organize special training and recruitment programs for women.

Black liberation was also part of your program when you ran for office. How was that received?

Well no one was surprised. I had a reputation as a fighter for black rights.

In 2017, when nooses appeared at the SSA [Marine] terminal, I gathered together a group of mostly black workers who confronted the Local 10 president. He originally said that to mobilize against the nooses would be "divisive." But we argued him down and forced him to put out a statement telling members that the union had their backs. It was a really liberal statement that wrongly advocated collaboration with the PMA bosses in combating discrimination in the workplace, but at least it made the point that the union would fight to defend its members against racist violence.

The role of the labor bureaucracy is to preach reliance on the bosses' parties and state and to sabotage any move toward mobilizing labor's power independently. I am best known in Local 10 for my opposition to voting for the Democrats and my advocacy of a workers party to fight for workers power.

It was relatively easy for me to get Local 10 on board with the Open the Police Archives campaign; we passed a motion and the Local 10 president wrote letters to a number of local city councils demanding that the archives be opened and the 100 worst cases be revealed. As part of that campaign, I mobilized to get the ILWU to support Terry Lovett's campaign to get an independent autopsy for her son, Jalani, who was killed in the L.A. Central Jail. She has spoken several times at union gatherings.

But I lost when I waged a fight on the floor of a union meeting against giving money to so-called "progressive" Democratic Party district attorney Pamela Price. She had done nothing to bring murderous cops to justice, but she was facing a racist recall campaign. Most Local 10 members still think the only way to fight for black rights is to rely on the Democrats.

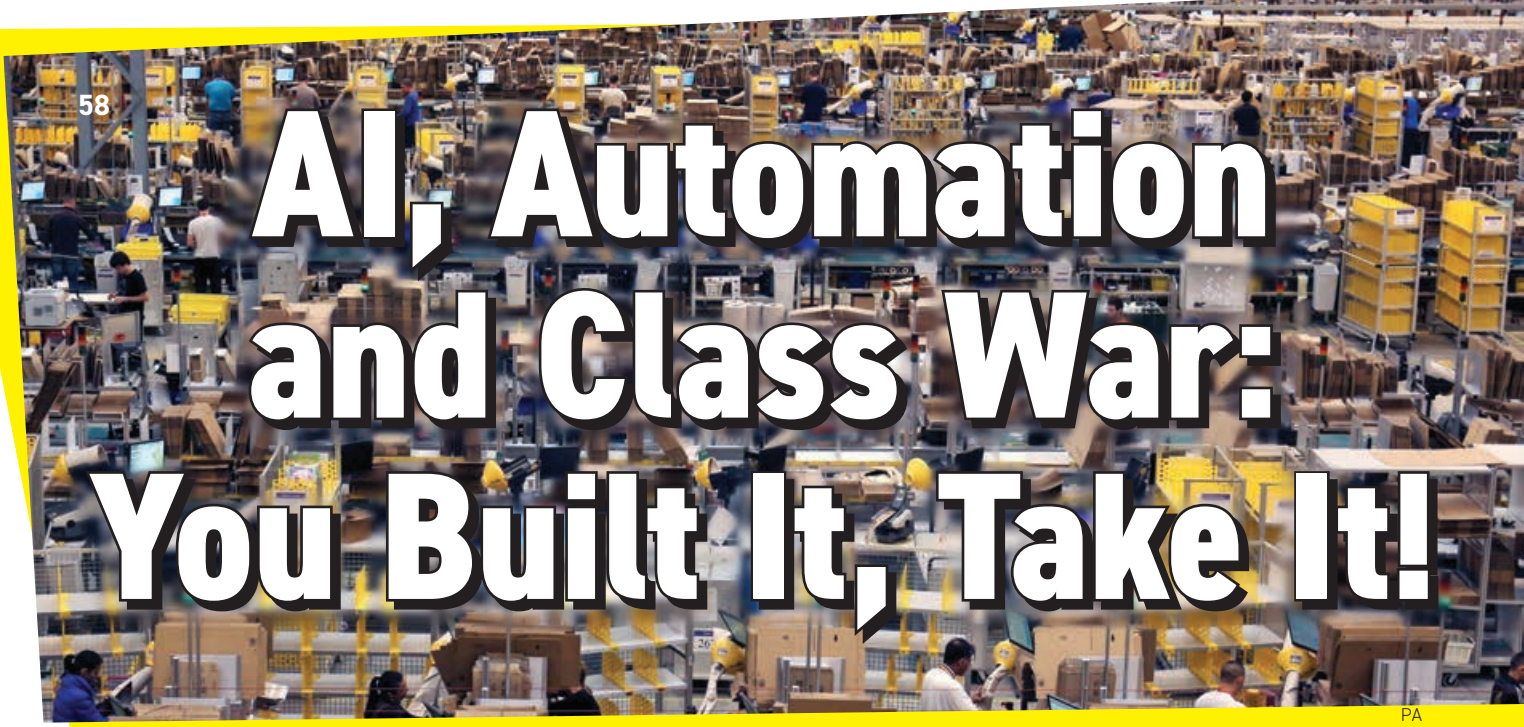
The argument I have the most with black co-workers is about black liberation—most believe that white workers will never fight for it. They have never seen that in their lifetime, but they have seen betrayals. It will take some real class battles, with white workers championing the defense of black workers, in order to prove in practice that it can be done. White workers need to learn they cannot advance their own conditions unless they fight in defense of black people's rights as well.

Workers, black and white, have no sense of their real social power and no idea that if they act together, they can bring down the capitalist system. The misleaders of the labor movement want to keep it that way. But that is exactly why it is so important to fight within the unions to strengthen them so workers can wage even small defensive fights and get a sense of their own social power.

If there is one piece of advice from your time in longshore, what would it be?

Whether your union leaders are open supporters of Donald Trump, like the ILA's Dennis Daggett, or they trend toward Bernie Sanders progressivism, like in ILWU Local 10, they are still the main obstacles. You can't ignore them. You have to work patiently in the unions, mobilizing the membership around its own interests to defeat the bureaucracy in practice. You can never lose sight of that. ■

AI, Automation and Class War: You Built It, Take It!



PA

Amazon warehouse, epitome of speedup and burnout.

BY JOE SOL

There is endless hype insisting that the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) is the most innovative moment in history—that this will create new opportunities, new industries and a bright future. While "tech bros" Elon Musk, Sam Altman and Jensen Huang promise limitless possibilities, working-class youth in America are living something entirely different: rising rents, low wages and precarious work. There are few jobs, and those are degrading: no benefits, no security, no future. As one young worker put it, "You will be obsolete before you even had a chance to work."

The social crisis unfolding around AI is the product of a capitalist system that cannot offer stability or rising living standards. The two dominant responses to AI—doom and hype—both disarm young workers. Doom says nothing can be done, the future is already decided, survival means keeping your head down. Hype says adapt individually, hustle harder, treat social breakdown as a personal opportunity. These stories sound counterposed, but they push in the same direction: isolation, fear and submission to the existing order.

Young workers are entering a world in which none of the old guarantees remain and illusions of automatic progress have collapsed. Under the control of the bourgeoisie, all new technology (including AI) is used to speed up work, discipline labor and produce profit. Under the control of the working class, the same tools could shorten the workday, raise living standards and expand human freedom. The difference is not the machinery. It is which class rules.

Automation Is Not New

AI is not a qualitative rupture in the relationship between machines and humans. It does not, and cannot, replace human labor as the source of value, nor does it constitute a new mode of production. And despite the fantasies of tech moguls and the press, it is not on the brink of automating society into either a workerless paradise or a workerless dystopia.

What we are seeing today is the broad mechanization of intellectual labor—but not for the first time. Capital has been breaking down mental labor, formalizing it and automating pieces of it for over a century. Typewriters wiped out clerical positions. Electronic calculators replaced human "computers." Mainframes eliminated payroll departments. Desktop computers decimated printing trades, secretarial pools and travel agencies. Early software automated vast layers of mid-level office work. Algorithmic platforms replaced dispatchers and warehouse schedulers.

AI belongs to this same historical process. What is new is not the basic logic but the scale and speed with which it can now be applied. AI systems touch coding, customer serv-

Grillot/Bloomberg

Abilene, Texas: Construction at Stargate AI data center.

ice, design, logistics, research, advertising and clerical work simultaneously. They allow capital to centralize planning, monitor workers in real time and fragment jobs that once required human experience and judgment.

AI Under Capitalism Means Speedup and Degradation

AI rests on the same foundation as every other industry under capitalism: the labor of millions of workers. The data centers powering these systems do not appear out of thin air. They are built by construction workers, electricians and engineers. They rely on miners extracting copper and rare-earth metals, truck drivers hauling equipment, utility workers generating enormous quantities of electricity and technicians maintaining hardware around the clock. Since AI marks not a rupture but an acceleration, it intensifies the same class relations already shaping the economy.

Tama/Getty

California, August 2024: SAG-AFTRA video game performers on strike over threat of massive job losses with AI.

Look at translation. A generation studying languages enters a labor market where machine translation performs in seconds what once required hours. Work does not disappear entirely—it is degraded, sped up and cheapened. Fewer workers are retained. Those who remain are expected to produce more for less. The skill remains, but its value is driven down because capital can now restructure the labor process around automation.

Look at Amazon: a logistics empire run by algorithmic management where workers are tracked to the second, disciplined by software, pushed to inhuman productivity rates and burned out ***as part of the business model***. Warehouses filled with robotics and machine-learning systems are designed to squeeze more labor out of fewer bodies. Surveillance expands. Speed increases. Injury rates rise. Attempts to unionize are met with retaliation and legal attack.

This is not because Amazon chairman Jeff Bezos is uniquely evil (although he may be). It is because capitalism is driven by cutthroat competition. Every firm that can reduce labor costs, speed up production and streamline planning to gain an advantage must do so or be crushed by rivals. If a machine can discipline labor, it will be used to do so. If software can fragment skilled work into lower-paid, tedious tasks, then jobs will be reorganized accordingly. This compulsion is essential to capitalist enterprise.

Society already has the technology and productive capacity to shorten working hours, raise living standards and ensure that no one goes hungry. The problem is that under capitalism, the productive power of humanity has outgrown the cramped, irrational cage of capitalism—and the imperialist order that protects it. So instead of stability and abundance, the working class gets layoffs, hunger and war.

The Question of Power

From Santiago to Lagos to Jakarta and Manila, Gen-Z uprisings have erupted as youth are told to accept misery and despair. Layers of youth who expected advancement through education, credentials or creative careers are being pushed into the working class, where they confront exploitation, precarity and slavish discipline. The fate of educated youth becomes more tightly bound to that of the ***working class as a whole***.

As production becomes more integrated, the leverage of workers does not disappear; it becomes more concentrated. But what prevents it from being exercised is the absence of the organization and consciousness sufficient to wield it. The ruling class is by its very nature class conscious; it understands its interests and defends them relentlessly. The working class does not automatically arrive at a unified consciousness. It is saturated with false narratives designed to keep it weak and divided by race, sex, nationality, immigration status and profession.

AI systems expand society's productive power, but that power is turned against workers. The struggle over AI cannot be resolved at the level of individual adaptation, by learning to prompt better or hustle harder. As long as the means of production remain privately owned, every technological advance will be bent toward profit. The question becomes one of ownership and power—which class controls the productive forces, which class directs the state that protects those forces.

Even the most basic defensive demands—no layoffs, shorter hours, transparency, control over implementation—require collective, militant enforcement. They will not be conceded; they must be fought for. And in fighting for them, the contradiction sharpens: ***You cannot control what you do not own.*** You cannot democratize machinery that answers to capital. You cannot permanently advance workers' interests while production remains organized for private profit. But you can build the collective power capable of ending capitalist control over production and reorganizing society around human need. To do this requires organization. It requires coordination across sectors and borders. It requires a conscious movement of the working class acting in its own historic interests.

You built it.
You trained it.
You make it run...
Take it!

China Daily @insidehistory

Liu'an, Anhui Province, June 2013 (left): Students travel by bus to the *gaokao*, as family and friends crowd the streets to see them off. Right: A Chinese student poses beside stacks of notebooks and exam papers from years of *gaokao* preparation.

China…

(continued from page 64)

the U.S. rulers believed that China's integration into the liberal world order would eventually lead to the collapse of the CPC and the workers state. Instead, China became a strategic rival that had to be contained. Among other measures, Washington imposed higher tariffs and strengthened export controls in order to restrict the PRC's access to advanced semiconductors and related technologies.

The fundamental problem is that the CPC has no strategy to defeat imperialism. The way it seeks to ensure that China will not suffer another "century of humiliation" is to defend the free-trade system to the death. But even while China's massive industrial growth inside that system gave it some cards to play, this came at an unbearable social cost: inhuman work hours, sweatshop conditions, depressed consumption and hellish competition. And now, as Trump takes an ax to the neoliberal order, prospects for Chinese youth are becoming even dimmer.

That is the framework within which youth oppression in China today has to be understood. The CPC bureaucracy is trying to preserve the workers state while fearing any prospect of mobilizing the Chinese proletariat to fight against imperialist domination, which would threaten its own privileges. The current disenchantment and despair among youth reflect the fact that the CPC's course is leading to a dead end. To turn this situation around, they need a perspective to unite the exploited and oppressed masses in China and internationally in an anti-imperialist struggle. This is our starting point for analyzing some of the key problems facing Chinese youth today.

Gaokao: The Bureaucratic Sorting Machine

One cannot talk about the oppressive conditions facing Chinese youth without starting with education. At the pinnacle of this system is the *gaokao* exam, which high-school students take to determine their place in the scramble for university seats.

Reinstated in 1977, the *gaokao* replaced the Maoist policy of preferential placements in higher education for workers, peasants and soldiers. Under Deng Xiaoping, this change was justified by the need to develop technical specialists who would help China catch up with the advanced capitalist countries. On paper, the *gaokao* looks like a planned, meritocratic method of developing the workers state. In reality, its framework created hellish competition for spots at the top universities, favoring those with the means to best prepare their children for the exam. Thus the system has reinforced social and regional inequality.

A major part of this process is the *hukou* household registration system, which regulates a child's access to public schooling. By tying educational opportunity not to where one lives and studies but to one's registered birthplace, the *hukou* effectively divides the population into rural and urban castes. Even where equal access is promised on paper, the best schools favor urban *hukou* holders and families with stable housing, while the children of migrant workers are pushed into underfunded schools or forced back to their home counties. The best schools attract wealthier families to buy into particular school districts, pushing working-class families out and deepening social divisions.

What is presented as an orderly way to administer schools and boost local finances is in fact a way to ration life chances from childhood onward. The vocational track is where this sorting becomes especially naked. At the end of junior secondary, millions of students are pushed off the academic route—with Jiangsu Province's cutoff excluding about one-half of the test takers—and are funneled into vocational and technical schools. The state praises this setup as "multiple pathways to success." In reality, these schools disproportionately absorb rural and working-class youth, often offering neither a strong general education nor meaningful technical training. Too often, "internships" amount to little more than a pipeline into cheap labor. Whether one is pushed into

vocational school early or survives long enough to face the *gaokao*, education is organized to allocate scarce credentials and sort youth into social strata fixed for life.

The *gaokao* is the most refined form of this system. Though formally standardized within provinces, access to top universities is largely determined by provincial quotas, family resources and regional privilege. The problem is not simply that the system is harsh or opaque. It is that one's future is decided far too early, when family background overwhelmingly determines one's preparation, confidence and room to maneuver. The bureaucracy presents this as meritocracy, but it is a managed competition whose outcomes are heavily shaped before the *gaokao* is ever taken.

This is why the Jiangyou incident last year mattered far beyond one school scandal. After a video of three teenage girls beating and humiliating a 14-year-old classmate went viral, public outrage spread rapidly, especially as the attackers reportedly boasted that their parents "have connections" and would protect them. What followed exposed the bureaucracy's governing method in miniature. Promises that the case was being handled "according to law" quickly gave way to repression once protests grew—riot police, arrests and online suppression. The deeper issue was not school violence but the broader sense that you live in an educational and political order that breeds humiliation, shields privilege and treats popular anger as a threat to stability.

Bureaucratic reforms cannot solve the problem at its root. For example, the 2021 "Double Reduction" policy targeted real grievances—excessive homework, cram schools and the tutoring arms race. But these were just Band-Aids on the gaping wound of social inequality bred by "socialism with Chinese characteristics." As long as the stakes are the same, the system will create incentives for rich bureaucrats and capitalists to pay for private tutors and find other workarounds.

As socialists, we do not propose to fine-tune this machine. What is needed is to take education out of bureaucratic hands and subordinate it to the ***democratic needs of working people***. That means fighting to weaken the tyranny of birth and early sorting by equalizing resources between elite and ordinary schools, guaranteeing higher education for industrial workers and rural youth and fusing academic and technical training.

@YesterdayBigcat

Jiangyou, Sichuan Province, 5 August 2025: Residents raise phones at mass protest demanding justice for a 14-year-old girl after a school bullying case triggered public outrage.

A socialist education system should develop all-sided human potential, not lock youth into the fate assigned to them by family background, *hukou* and other bureaucratic measures. The more that youth see the system discriminate against them, the less stake they will have in defending New China. But if they and the entire working class mobilize to fight inequality and take control of their fate, this would be the best defense of the workers state.

From Iron Rice Bowl to "Gig Work"

Soaring youth unemployment in recent years shows the problems of inequality and scarcity from another angle. For many youth, factory work no longer appears as a way to a stable future but as exhausting, insecure labor with few rewards and protections. The education system reinforces biases against factory work by advocating white-collar salvation: study hard, escape the workshop, get the office job. But secure white-collar positions are themselves increasingly restricted as the economy hits strong headwinds.

The expansion of China's higher-education system has not gotten rid of the employment bottleneck; it has simply widened the entrance to it. While the official urban unemployment rate was 5.2% last year, youth joblessness peaked that August at 18.9%. This is one reason that "flexible work" (short-term employment) and gig work have swollen so rapidly. Official figures put the number of short-term workers at 200 million, while those in gig work—delivery drivers, couriers, ride-hail drivers, etc.—is around 84 million. The gig sector has become a means to absorb those pushed aside in the rush to technologically upgrade production and by the ever-higher level of credentials needed to get jobs.

This situation poses a basic political question: Why, in a society born of a revolution that overturned capitalism, is it not good enough to be an industrial worker? Why does the road to a decent life appear to run only through joining the bureaucracy or clawing your way up the corporate ladder, leaving the mass of youth oscillating between bad factory jobs, unemployment and precarious service labor?

An Ming/Feature China

Fuyang, Anhui Province, 22 March 2025: Students attend a job fair.

Hong Kong News

Changsha, Hunan Province, 22 December 2025: Delivery riders protest outside the HeNeng PuLi residential complex, circling and honking until late at night after a conflict over delivery access rules.

The answer lies in the CPC's development strategy. The regime seeks to keep China competitive and able to stand up to its enemies while suppressing the self-activity of the working class and accepting imperialist world hegemony. So it pours resources into technological upgrading and "whole industrial chains" (self-sufficient production networks) while supporting unprofitable factories that keep churning out exports. For workers this means brutally long hours while wages and social security lag behind industrial development. What youth feel as hopelessness is the result of a bureaucratic structure that degrades labor while reducing the chances of landing good white-collar jobs.

Home Is Where the Debt Is

In recent years, one of the most revealing memes about family and marriage among Chinese youth has been *ligong siwei* (manual laborer mindset). On the surface, this mocks a certain kind of blue-collar man who grinds for years and hoards every yuan, then throws all his savings into a down payment for an apartment, bride price and wedding in the hope of "locking in" a wife once and for all. The "laborer all-in law" variant jokes that such men "go all in" on a wife the way one pushes all one's chips into the pot in poker. In the West, some young men twist their despair that building a family is out of reach into reactionary black pill and incel misogyny instead of criticizing the system that produces the situation.

What the *ligong siwei* meme captures is not simple contempt for workers. It is the bitter recognition that marriage and family have become a life sentence of mortgage payments, bride-price debt, childcare and elder care that falls hardest on those with the least security. When young men sneer at *ligong siwei* and young women recoil from being cast as the "investment target" in this script, both express the truth that family has been turned from a shelter into a high-risk financial project.

Addressing the situation in the Soviet Union, Leon Trotsky argued in *Problems of Everyday Life* that under conditions of scarcity, the family was forced to function as a little private welfare office, carrying burdens that a socialist society would take on collectively. In China today, that logic is reproduced as the CPC praises family responsibility while refusing to build the necessary social housing, nurseries, canteens and elder-care facilities that would make such sloganeering anything other than moral blackmail.

The Chinese bureaucracy treats housing as a speculative asset and source of government revenue, and there remains a strong expectation that a couple, especially the man, must buy an apartment before marriage. In big cities, the value of that apartment is tied not only to square meters but also to school-zone status. The "right" home is thus supposed to pay for itself twice—as a place to live and as a ticket to a decent public school for a future child. Pensions and welfare remain patchy, so parents expect their only child to be their main insurance in old age.

Ligong siwei is a warped adaptation to these pressures. When the state will not guarantee adequate housing, childcare or retirement, men are driven to treat marriage as a one-shot investment while women are pressured to weigh suitors by their ability to shoulder an impossible burden of costs. Raising the next generation is shoved into the narrow framework of the family, and that becomes a source of anxiety and demoralization.

For decades, the Chinese bureaucracy has zigzagged on family policy to suit its own needs. Under Mao, while the state provided rudimentary collective childcare and kitchens, the low level of those services kept the burden of domestic labor on women's shoulders. When the CPC later imposed a one-child limit on families, the same apparatus resorted to fines, work-unit discipline and invasive reproductive monitoring in the name of modernization.

Today, facing population decline and a shrinking labor force, the regime has lurched into pro-natalist panic. Women are urged to have more children, "good mothers" are celebrated and youth are called selfish if they refuse to follow course. Young people who were told that their parents did their duty by limiting families are now lectured that they must save the nation by building larger families they can't afford.

The CPC's response to youth who don't respond to this appeal can be seen in its new judicial interpretation of the Civil Code's Marriage and Family section. Rather than

Sixth Tone

Langzhong, Sichuan Province, 1950: A woman files for divorce from her underage husband after the promulgation of the Marriage Law.

changing the conditions that make family life unbearable, it mostly clarifies how divorce, debt and property should be handled. The rules make divorce hard to reverse and protect creditors when division of property undermines debt collection. They also specify how housing should be divided and allow the spouse who bore more responsibility for child-rearing and elder care to claim compensation at divorce.

At first glance, this looks like progress. But nothing in this package touches the fact that housing remains a commodity tied to school-zone competition, that pensions and childcare remain underfunded and that youth are financially crushed before they even consider children. The bureaucracy props up the family as the basic unit responsible for survival, then tells women and men that with the right contracts, deeds and lawyers they can negotiate a fair outcome. The ruling caste turns these problems, which are based on structural oppression, into a question of one's choice of a spouse.

Nobody under 40 in China needs a lecture on why marriage feels like a trap. Young men's disgust with *ligong siwei* reflects their fear of being turned into a "walking ATM" and still being told that any failure is personal. Young women's refusal of marriage and childbearing is not a mysterious "values crisis" but a rational form of self-defense in a system that expects them to patch every hole with unpaid care work, endless emotional support and tolerance for discrimination and violence while sacrificing their careers.

If young people are to have a way out, the answer has to begin with material change, not moral sermons. Only the ***socialization of domestic and care labor, under workers democracy***, can provide the material basis for the liberation of women and youth.

What Is To Be Done?

The false alternatives offered to youth today are to lie flat or grind harder. Neither solves anything. Lying flat retreats from a rigged system but leaves it standing. Grinding harder accepts the bureaucracy's terms and turns every other young person into a rival. One path ends in resignation, the other in dog-eat-dog competition.

The question is what force can offer a progressive alternative. Youth by themselves do not have the power to do that. The decisive force is the working class, above all the enormous industrial proletariat created by the development of the People's Republic. The task is to link youth discontent to working-class power. To do that requires breaking workers from the illusion that the PRC can be defended by following the CPC's path of peaceful coexistence and national competition, with its corollary that the masses must sacrifice even as they get decreasing returns for their labor.

A revolutionary answer would mean much more than better policies. It would mean taking education out of the hands of self-interested bureaucrats, even the "enlightened" ones, and subordinating it to the task of socialist construction under workers' control. It would mean opening paths for retraining later in life rather than fixing destinies in adolescence. It would mean reducing work hours; expanding public housing, childcare and elder care; minimizing the family's role as the default shock absorber of social crisis. It would also mean encouraging the independent organization of youth and workers, because it is the socialist consciousness of the proletariat that is the best defense of the workers state.

Above all, it would mean breaking with the CPC's conciliation of imperialism. China cannot free its youth while remaining trapped in a strategy that accepts the world market's terms and merely tries to compete better within them. Anti-imperialism must not remain patriotic theater. It must become class struggle from below, guided by proletarian internationalism. Otherwise, the desire to fight imperialism will either be captured by Han nationalism or trapped in despair.

Here is the progressive way out for China's youth: not lying flat, not grinding harder, but fighting imperialism by linking their fate to the independent political power of the working class, in China and internationally. When workers and youth bring that power to bear, they could break the bureaucracy's political stranglehold on the masses and take a great leap forward on the path to world socialism. ■

Landsberger collection

May Fourth Movement **by Liang Yulong, 1976. The painting evokes the militancy of student youth in anti-imperialist struggle.**

Lie Flat or Fight Imperialism

What's the Future for China's Youth?

BY LOU XANDER

Arise Suffering Slaves by Li Hua, post-1945. The print shows armed peasants rising in rebellion as civil war and social misery deepened under Guomindang rule.

"Lying flat" has become one of the sharpest expressions of the rampant mood of disillusionment among China's youth, depicting how they are choosing to opt out of intense competition in schools and brutal work conditions. Faced with relentless pressure in school, work, housing and family life, many young people no longer believe that grinding harder will bring a better future. This is not simply burnout. It marks a turning point in consciousness.

From the outside, this can seem paradoxical. China is not a failed society but the world's second-largest economic power. The very fact that youth can "lie flat" rather than have to fight for bare subsistence says something about the material gains won since the 1949 Revolution. What has changed the situation is the breakdown of the bargain the Communist Party of China (CPC) offered in the "reform and opening up" era. For decades, students and young workers accepted grueling conditions in schools and industry with the expectation that China's booming economy would lead to higher living standards. That prospect is now very dim.

Struck by the Covid epidemic and the CPC's draconian lockdowns, China's growth rate fell to 2.3% in 2020 and 3.1% in 2022, far below the previous pace. Even as growth rebounded, living standards and job prospects did not keep pace with the country's technological rise. The sense among many young people was not renewed confidence but blockage: even as China advanced, their prospects were narrowed by debt and stagnation.

This shift coincided with a sharp rise in imperialist pressure on the People's Republic of China (PRC). Previously,

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